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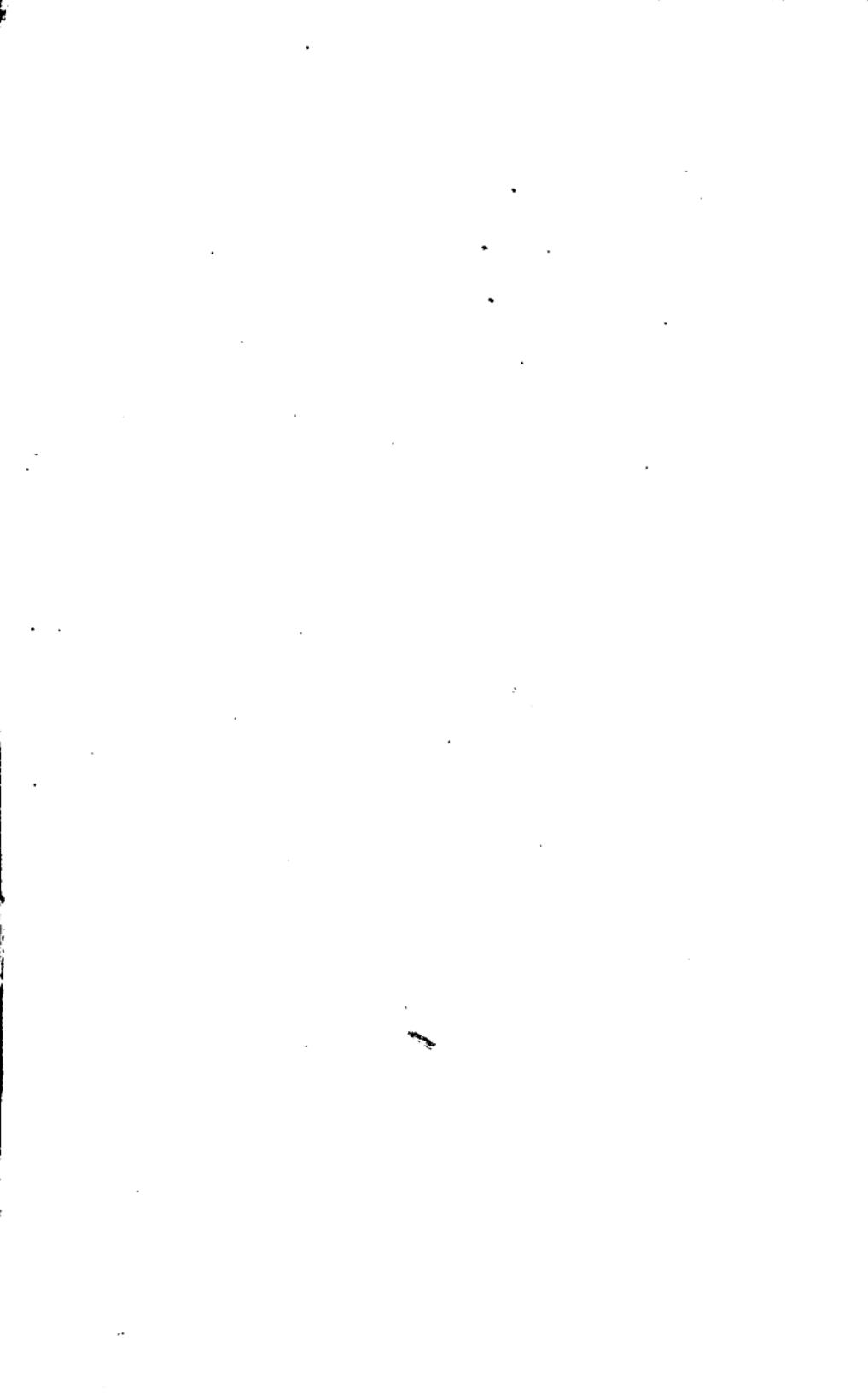
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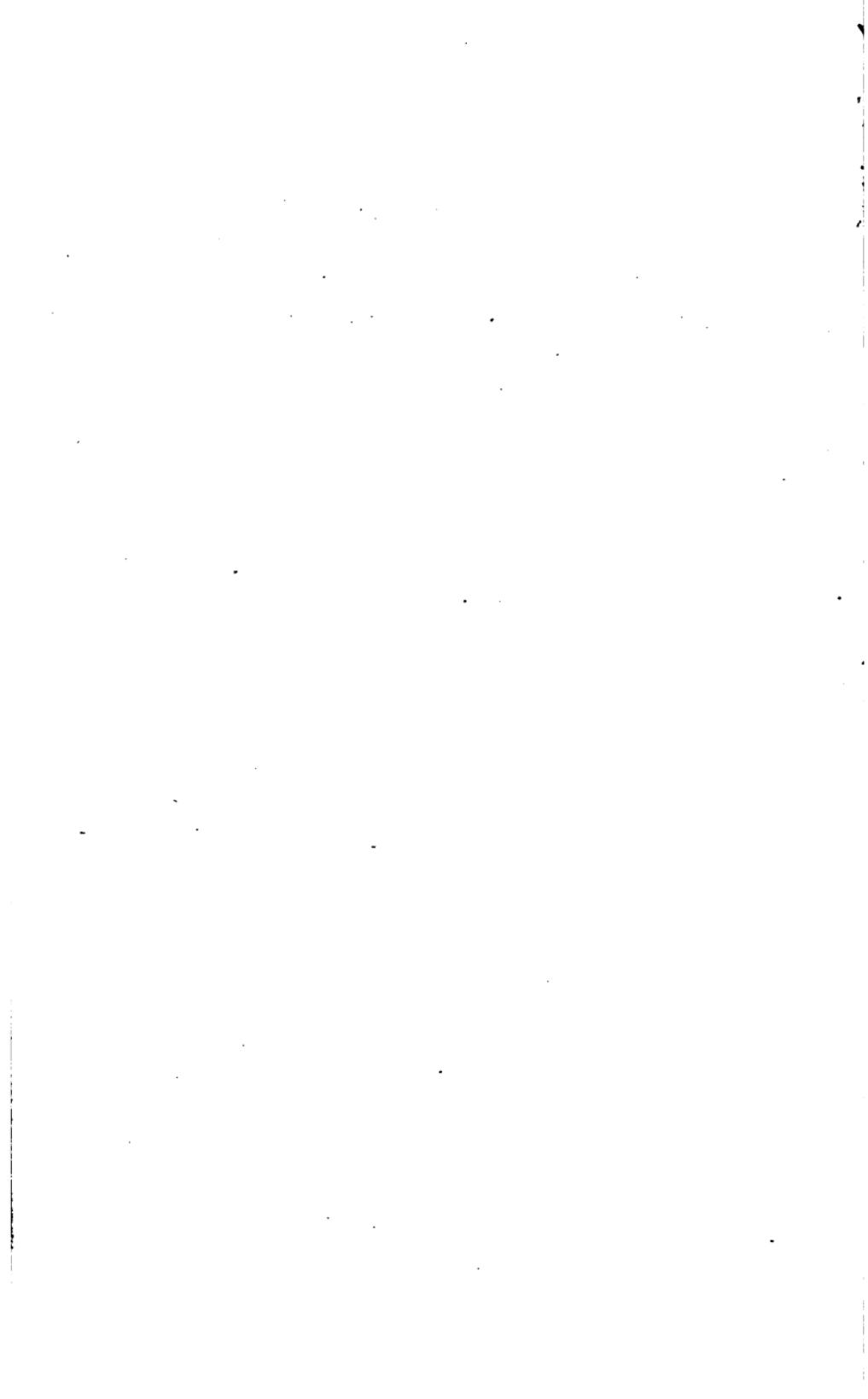
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THE
INCREASE OF FAITH



THE
INCREASE OF FAITH



THE
INCREASE OF FAITH

"And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."
—LUKE xvii. 5.

William Lee

SECOND EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE following work treats of the infancy, growth, and maturity of Christian Faith.

The doctrine on which it is founded,—namely, that faith in Christ (like the Christian life upon the whole) admits of gradual progress from less to more perfect development—may almost be said to be unknown to the science of Theology. If, however, this doctrine is not found in a definite and systematic form in the ordinary systems of doctrinal Christianity, it appears to be uniformly recognised by every writer of any authority, as one which enters essentially into the teaching of Holy Scripture.

With regard to the aim of the book, I must warn the reader that I have not here undertaken the task of writing a theologi-

cal treatise. I have attempted a practical rather than a scientific exposition of the Increase of Faith,—addressing myself, for the most part, to those who study subjects of this kind, not as theologians, but as religious inquirers, and especially to such of the latter class as are themselves sensible that their own faith in Christ is less perfect in many ways than it ought to be. And if what I have written has the effect of preventing persons thus “weak in the faith,” from either, on the one hand, giving way, as they often do, to useless and needless despondency; or, on the other hand, from settling down into a state of even more perilous contentment with their imperfect attainments,—the main object I have had in view will have been secured.

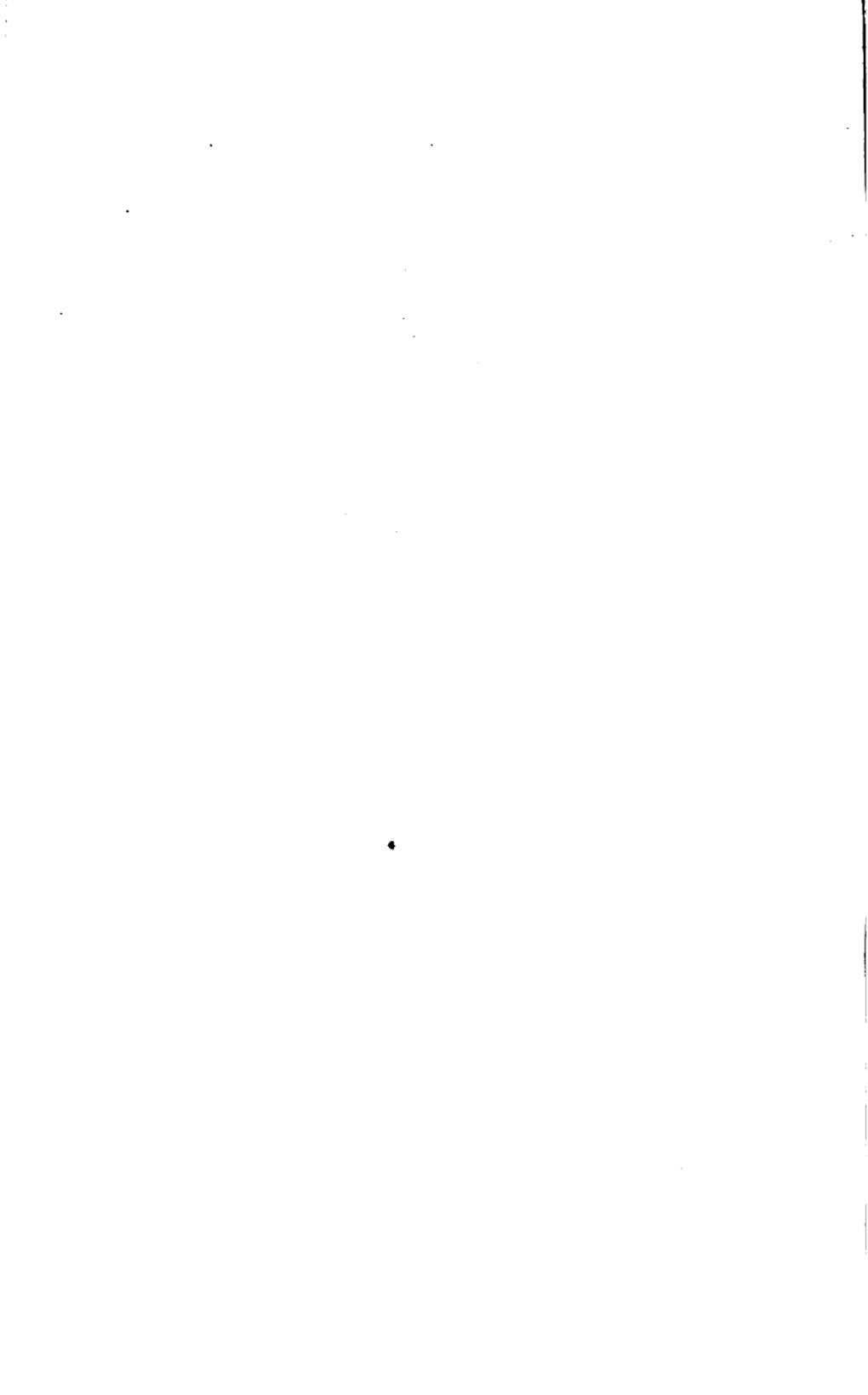
In this Edition considerable additions have been made to Chapter II. and Chapter IV. of the original work, for the purpose chiefly of explaining more fully the precise meaning attached by the writer to such terms as “weak faith,” “defective faith,” and “increase of faith.” Pains have also been taken to obviate an objection to the

former edition, on the ground that sufficient prominence was not given to questions relating to the Christian evidences. These questions have not certainly been dealt with either before or now as the principal, and much less as the only, topics to be attended to. For I have endeavoured (however unsuccessfully) to treat a very wide subject in the only way in which I think it can be treated with advantage; namely, in a wide and comprehensive spirit.

The work has been carefully revised throughout, and will be found, I trust, in some degree less unworthy than it was of the favourable reception it met with when first published a few months ago.

WILLIAM LEE, D.D.

ROXBURGH, *May 12, 1868.*



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CHAPTER I.

OF THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH.

"The word Faith is used to signify that *theological virtue* or *gracious habit*, whereby we embrace with our minds and affections the Lord *Jesus Christ*, as the only begotten Son of God, and alone Saviour of the world, casting ourselves wholly upon the *mercy* of God through His *merits* for remission and everlasting salvation. It is that . . . whereunto are inscribed in Holy Writ those many gracious effects of *purifying* the heart, *adoption*, *justification*, *life*, *joy*, *peace*, *salvation*, &c. Not as to their proper and primary *cause*; but as to the *instrument*, whereby we apprehend and apply *Christ*, whose *merit* and *spirit* are the true *causes* of all these blessed *effects*."—BISHOP SANDERSON'S *Sermon on Rom. xiv. 23.*

"They be not all faithless that are either weak in assenting to the truth, or stiff in maintaining things any way opposite to the truth of Christian doctrine. But as many as hold the foundation which is precious, though they hold it but weakly, and, as it were, but by a slender thread, . . . yet shall they pass the fiery trial and be saved."—R. HOOKE's *Learned Discourse on Justification*.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH.

IT is the aim of the following pages to encourage Christian believers not to rest satisfied with a weak or otherwise imperfect faith, but ever to strive earnestly after higher attainments in this respect in the divine life, by showing them to what extent, as well as through what means, faith is capable of growth and increase.

Before entering, however, upon the important subject thus indicated—a subject to which, perhaps, too little attention has been given by writers on theology—it may be proper that something should be said as to the preliminary question, What is faith? that is, What is the faith of the Christian—the faith for the increase of which it is our duty to strive and to hope?

A perfect definition is, I think, neither possible nor necessary. No formal exposition of the nature of Christian faith, as a whole, is, at all events, found in the inspired volume. The well-

known passage, Heb. xi. 1 ("Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"), which most nearly approaches to this character, and which some divines accept as a professed *definitio fidei*,* though invaluable on other accounts, especially when considered in connection with the examples from Old Testament history that accompany it, is yet certainly neither intended nor fitted to give a complete view of that which constitutes the faith of the Christian.

For such a complete view the reader must be

* Bishop O'Brien, for instance, finds very much on "the well-known account of faith which occurs in the Epistle to the Hebrews," his view that faith is, in truth *fiducia*. See *Nature and Effects of Faith*, p. 20-23, and note C, p. 274. That he has the support of many writers, both ancient and modern, in holding Heb. xi. 1 to be a definition of faith, must be admitted even by such as are unable to see that the Apostle, in the passage in question, had any intention to define faith in general, and much less justifying faith. Calvin's argument against what must be called the prevailing interpretation of this text, may be here given : "Nam Apostoli consilium est probare quod dixerat opus scilicet esse patientia. Citavit testimonium Habacuc qui dicit justum fide sua vivere ; nunc quod restabat, ostendit, non magis à patientia fidem avelli quam à seipsa posse. Quare talis est orationis series, Nunquam perveniemus ad salutis metam, nisi patientia simus instructi. Propheta enim justum fide victorum asserit, atqui fides ad res procul remotas nos vocat, et quibus nondum potimus ; necessario igitur patientiam in se continet. Itaque in syllogismo hæc minor propositio erit, Fides est substantia, &c. Unde etiam apparet longè falli eos qui justam fidei definitionem h̄c poni existimant ; neque enim hic de tota fidei natura disserit Apostolus, sed partem elegit suo instituto congruentem : nempe quod cum patientia semper conjuncta sit."—Ep. ad Hebræos, *in loc.*

referred, not to any one text even of Holy Writ, but to all Scripture, which will be found to consist throughout, either of a revelation of the objects of faith, or of expositions setting forth the true properties of the grace itself. Is there not even some presumption in the endeavour to condense into a sentence or two that which it has pleased God to diffuse over so large a volume, and to express in so many and various words—none of them, doubtless, without signification? Is it, indeed, possible to abstract the idea of faith from its relations to the life in which it is manifested: that life of infinite complexity, endless variety, and ceaseless fluctuation—the life of faith? Or, by a definition, to give any clearer conception of the one than of the other?*

While, however, not attempting a complete definition, and admitting that unspeakably more than can be reduced to any formula is in Scripture comprehended under the name, and is included in the actings, of this grace, there can be, I think, no difficulty in ascertaining or in express-

* "When I speak of faith, I am not speaking of a definition, . . . but of something existing. I wish to deal with things, not with words. I do not look to be put off with a name or a shadow. I would treat of faith as it is actually found in the soul. . . . It has a depth, a breadth, and a thickness; it has an inward life which is something over and above itself: it has a heart, and blood, and pulses, and nerves, though not upon the surface."—Newman's *Lectures on Justification*, p. 300.

ing the essential character of Christian faith ; no difficulty in discovering and stating what those qualities are without which true faith, as a saving grace, does not exist at all, and with which, however imperfect otherwise, it is yet true and saving. Nor, I think, can there be any reasonable doubt that, as to its essence, *Christian faith is trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.*

The terms of this statement may perhaps require a word or two of explanation. For instance, (1) when it is said that Christian faith is *trust* in Christ, it is, of course, implied that though thus essentially a state of the affections, faith also includes elements which are strictly intellectual. It may not consist, as to its radical principle, in an assent of the understanding to the truths of Christianity, and yet it may presuppose such an assent. This I believe to be its true nature. A reasonable basis in arguments and evidences, addressed to the reason, is not only of the highest importance as our only safeguard against the delusions of fanaticism, but appears sooner or later to enter into the nature of faith. The faith of the Christian, whatever else it may be, is a reasonable faith. (2) When, again, it is said that Christian faith is trust in *Jesus Christ*, it must not be understood that our faith is in the Son of God to the exclusion of the Eternal Father. It is not in the Son to the exclusion of the Father, any

more than it is or ever was in the Father to the exclusion of the Son. What saving faith may have been in the case of Abraham or the prophets need not be particularly inquired. Even *their* faith recognised not only the Father but the Son ; dimly, it is true, as one seen afar off, yet efficaciously. In what form, and to what extent, the faith of patriarchs and prophets had respect to the Son, is not to us a practical question. It is one of those questions to which our Lord's rejoinder to Peter, when he asked concerning John, "Lord, what shall this man do ?" is the fit reply, namely, "What is that to thee ? follow thou me." But these men certainly in some sense believed both in God and in Christ. This at least is our own duty. We must remember that Jesus Christ and the Father are one.* To the Christian, therefore, faith in God and faith in Christ are the same. He believes in God as manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.† And he believes in Christ as the Son of God ; Emmanuel, God with us ; God manifested in the flesh.‡ Faith in God and faith in Christ are accordingly terms used in Scripture interchangeably, as having the same meaning.§ And (3) when it is said that faith is

* John x. 30. † Heb. i. 3 ; John xiv. 6 ; Rom. xv. 6.

‡ John iii. 18 ; Isa. vii. 14 ; Mat. i. 23 ; 1 Tim. iii. 16.

§ *e.g.*, Acts xvi. 31, 34.

trust in Christ *for salvation*, it is not to be understood that our trust in Christ, or in God through Christ, has respect to nothing but salvation. Salvation is the primary want of the soul, and it is the introduction to all other blessings ; as it is written, " Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all . . . things [that ye have need of] shall be added to you." * But faith has respect, not to salvation only in the strict sense of that word, but to whatever is implied in the favour of God.

Trust in Jesus Christ, then—a resting upon Him for God's mercy and favour—will here be assumed to be an essential, and the only absolutely essential, constituent of a true scriptural faith. That it is so appears to be as clearly taught as anything could be taught, in the words of our Lord himself to Nicodemus.† These words, which cannot be recalled to mind too frequently, leave, I think, no more room for uncertainty as to the meaning than as to the obligation of faith :—

" As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up ; that whosoever *believeth in Him* should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth in Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into

* Mat. vi. 33.

† John iii. 14-18.

the world to condemn the word ; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that *believeth on Him* is not condemned : but he that *believeth not* is condemned already, *because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*"*

That faith in Christ, or reliance upon Christ for salvation, is an essential, and the only essential, constituent of a true Christian faith, has not been, certainly, the uniform teaching of Christian divines. Whether those who in terms disclaim reliance on Christ as the theory of their own faith, may not yet sometimes, in spirit, so trust in Him, as through Him to obtain salvation, is another question. Men may be better as they may be worse than their professed principles. "How far," says President Edwards, "some may seem to maintain a doctrine contrary to this Gospel doctrine of justification, that really do not, but only express themselves differently from others ; . . . or may seem to differ more than they do by using expressions that are without a precisely fixed or determinate meaning ; or to be wide in their sentiments from this doctrine for want of a distinct understanding of it, whose hearts at the same time entirely agree with it, and if once it were clearly explained to their understanding, would immediately close with it and embrace it : how far these things may be,

* John iii. 14-18.

I will not determine; but I am fully persuaded that great allowances are to be made on these and suchlike accounts in innumerable instances.”* But expositions of faith which, to such as hold the opinion here adopted, cannot but appear grievously erroneous, have not been unknown in any age of the Church, and often have prevailed all but universally. One of the more important of these perversions of the Scripture doctrine is the notion that by saving, or, as it is sometimes called, justifying, faith, is meant a mere intellectual assent to the truth—a notion in which the Church of Rome † is followed by more than one school of Protestants, in other respects as far removed as possible from Romanism, and from one another. ‡ A theory of the nature of faith even more opposed to the views already explained, is that of writers like Bishop Bull, who make justify-

* Edwards’s Sermon on Justification, part v. sec. 6.

† “ Jam vero Catholici agnoscunt quidem vocabulum fidei, in divinis literis non semper uno, et eodem modo sumi . . . tamen fidem historicam, et miraculorum, et promissionum unam et eandem esse docent, atque illam unam non esse propriè notitiam, aut fiduciam, sed assensum certum, atque firmissimum, ob auctoritatem primæ veritatis; et hanc unam esse fidem justificantem.”—Bellarmin, *De Justificatione*, l. i. c. iv.

‡ Sandeman’s Letters on Theron and Aspasio, vol. ii. p. 300, and Epistolary Correspondence with Mr Pike, lett. vi.; Erskine’s (H.) *Essay on Saving Faith*, p. 20, &c.; Dr John Erskine’s Theological Dissertations, Diss. iii.; also, *Nature and Effects of Faith* (note A), p. 253; Fuller’s (A.) *Strictures on Sandemanianism*, lett. iii.; Buchanan’s *Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, p. 190.

ing faith a mere pseudonym for justifying works—interpreting “the faith to which justification is attributed by Paul,” not as a simple but a complex term, which stands for “*omnia Christianæ pietatis opera.*”* On another view, not less erroneous, I shall afterwards have occasion to remark more fully; but some reference must be made to it at once,—namely, the view that justifying or saving faith consists in the assurance that the believer is himself in a state of grace and salvation.

I shall not here attempt to determine how far it is true that this view was taken, as has been alleged, by the early Reformers themselves. “*Assurance,*” says the late Sir William Hamilton, a very high authority on such questions—“personal assurance, the feeling that God is propitious to me, that my sins are forgiven, . . . was long universally held in the Protestant communities to be the criterion and condition of a true and saving faith, . . . and is part and parcel of all the Confessions of all the Churches of the Reformation down

* *Harmonia Apostolica*, Diss. Prior, cap. ii. sec. 10, and Diss. Post. cap. iv. sec. 5. See also, and especially, Dr Newman’s Lectures on Justification. Jeremy Taylor aptly expresses the opinion in question in the following passage: “*That a good life is the genuine and true-born issue of faith, no man questions that knows himself the disciple of the holy Jesus; but that obedience is the same thing with faith, and that all Christian graces are parts of its bulk and constitution, is also the doctrine of the Holy Ghost and the grammar of Scripture, making faith and obedience to be terms coincident and expressive of each other.*”—*Life of Christ*, p. 206.

to the Westminster Assembly. In that synod," he adds, "assurance [*i. e.*, personal assurance] was, in Protestantism, for the first time, declared not to be of the essence of faith."*

In this statement, as to its substance, Sir William Hamilton does not stand alone, having been anticipated, for instance, by Bishop Bull,† and by Roman Catholic writers like Bossuet and Cardinal Bellarmin.‡ The decree of the Council of Trent "On Justification" leaves, indeed, no doubt that the understanding of the Romish Church as to the Reformers' doctrine was to the same effect.§

* Hamilton's Discussions on Philosophy, p. 493, note.

† Harmonia Apostolica, Diss. Prior, cap. iv. sec. 6.

‡ Bellarmin's Disputationes ; De Justificatione, lib. I. cap. iv. ; and Bossuet's Histoire des Variations des Eglises Protestantes, liv. III. sec. xxxviii. Bellarmin does not, however, assert the view in question to have been universally held. His words are : "Fidem Lutherani *fere* omnes non tam notitiam, vel quam fiduciam esse definiunt. Atque eam demum fiduciam specialis misericordiae, fidem justificantem, esse docent."—*Ut supra*.

§ See the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, sess. VI. chap. ix., "Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics ;" and canons xii., xiii., and xiv., "On Justification." Paul Sarpi, in his History of the Council, states that the opinion of Luther as to justifying faith gave the divines "work enough," because that opinion had never been thought of, and therefore never confuted, by any of the schoolmen. The views of the Reformers were not, however, altogether without support in the Council, and the canons ultimately passed were not agreed to without considerable discussion. The friar Dominicus Soto was "followed by the major part" in holding that "no man without assumption could assure himself that he was in grace, but ought always to doubt." "For the other part," Sarpi goes on, "Catarinus held, and had many followers, that justifica-

Whether such a view of the doctrine of the Reformers, however, is a perfectly just one, is a question which, even with their own words before us, cannot be hastily decided. It is at least *possible* that the language of these men, in regard to justifying faith, may have been used in a somewhat different meaning from that which it certainly appears to bear. We must remember that the whole subject of justification by faith was, at the period of the Reformation, somewhat in the position of a new discovery in science, and that its very nomenclature was as yet unfixed. But even accepting what is the more obvious sense of the words employed, not once or twice, but uniformly, by the Reformers—and even supposing that (to use the guarded words of Owen) they did “place the essence of justifying faith in a fiducial trust in the grace of God by Christ, as declared in the promises, with a certain unwaver-

tion proceeded not from that trust, yet that the just might and ought to believe that he is in grace. Andreas Vega set a third opinion on foot, that it was neither temerity nor certain faith, yet that one might have a conjectural persuasion without sin. And this controversy could not be quitted. . . . Therefore it was first lightly discussed, then (*the parties being warmed*) *it divided, and held long in dispute all the Council.*”—History of the Council of Trent (1629), p. 194, 195. On the question whether the faith that justifies is “alone” or is “formed with charity,” there was also division. Thus, “Marinarus liked not it should be said that faith is formed with charity, because that kind of speech is not used by St Paul, but only that faith worketh by charity.”—Ibid. p. 195.

ing application of them to ourselves" *— our surprise at such an error on the part of men so worthy of our reverence and confidence will be lessened if we consider, as Owen has suggested, the circumstances of the times in which the Reformers lived. "That," he continues, "which inclined those great and holy persons so to express themselves, and to place the essence of faith in the highest actings of it, . . . was the state of the consciences of the men with whom they had to do." And he goes on to show that the Romish dogma that assurance of grace and salvation is in this life "impossible," was associated with some of the most fatal errors, as it was the pretext for some of the most shameless (they were also among the most lucrative) corruptions of Romanism. † Thus Luther himself: "It is

* Owen's Works (Goold's ed.), vol. v. p. 82.

† The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, Owen's Works, vol. v. p. 82. Owen's own opinion of the true place due to an assurance of grace and salvation is thus stated in the same treatise: "That [the pardon of our own sins in particular] is the object of justifying faith; that a man is bound to believe this in order of nature antecedent unto his justification I do deny: neither yet do I know of any testimony or safe experience whereby it may be confirmed. But yet for any to deny that an undeceiving belief hereof is to be attained in this life, or that it is our duty to believe the pardon of our own sins and the especial love of God in Christ, in the order and method of our duty and privileges, limited and determined in the Gospel, so as to come to a full assurance of them, . . . is to seem not to be much acquainted with the design of God in the Gospel. . . . Yet all these things *are rather fruits or effects of faith, as*

very expedient for the godly to know that they have the Holy Ghost. This I say to confute that pernicious doctrine of the Papists which taught that no man can certainly know (although his life be never so upright and blameless) whether he be in the favour of God or no. And this sentence, commonly received, was a special principle and article of faith in the whole Papacy, whereby they utterly defaced the doctrine of faith, tormented men's consciences, banished Christ quite out of the Church, darkened and denied all the benefits of the Holy Ghost, abolished the whole worship of God, set up idolatry, contempt of God, and blasphemy against God, in men's hearts.* It was no wonder if, in these circumstances, undue prominence and an exaggerated importance were given by the Reformers to an attainment which, if an effect rather than a part of faith, is certainly *not* impossible, and, in its own place, is of very great value to all believers, and ought to be sought by them with the greatest diligence.

However it may have been with the early Reformers, the view as to the nature of faith which they appear to have countenanced has been openly and in the broadest terms advocated in more recent times by writers who had not the

under exercise and improvement, than of the essence of it, as it is the instrument in our justification."—Ibid. p. 102.

* Commentary on the Galatians (English translation), p. 298.

same apology, and who, happily, have not the same authority.* The misery is not to be told that has been, and is every day, caused by misapprehensions thus fostered in regard to the relations of assurance of grace to saving faith—and not the misery only, but even more serious mischief in the way of self-delusion.* Though, as already said, the subject must be referred to again farther on, I embrace the earliest opportunity of protesting against a view of faith too commonly adopted in our own day, and which appears to have a fatal attraction for minds most apt to suffer from its reception. The doctrine of Scripture on the whole question seems to me to be well summed up in two or three vigorous

* It was a favourite tenet of the Independents of the time of the Commonwealth, as appears sufficiently from Baillie's *Dissuasive from the Errors of the Times* (1645) and Edwards's *Gangræna* (1646). In the controversy which was occasioned by the republication, in the year 1717, of the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1646) of Mr Edward Fisher of Oxford, the doctrine in question occupied a principal place. Marshall's *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, first published in the year 1692, and often reprinted, had great influence in disseminating the notion that faith is identical with assurance of grace; and the rather that Marshall's mode of explaining that tenet was professedly adopted and repeated in the *Theron and Aspasio* of Mr Hervey—also a book extensively, and in most respects deservedly, popular for a long series of years both in England and America. Mr Erskine's remarkable *Essay on Faith* and similar works again revived the question between thirty and forty years ago, especially in Scotland. Many well-known writers in the present day must be numbered among the supporters of the same views.

sentences of Richard Baxter: "I do not ask whether thou be assured of salvation, nor yet whether thou canst believe that thy sins are pardoned, and that thou art beloved of God in Christ. These are no parts of justifying faith, but excellent fruits and consequents, which they that do receive are comforted by them. But perhaps thou mayest never receive them while thou livest, and yet be a true heir of rest. Do not say, then, I cannot believe that my sin is pardoned, or that I am in God's favour, and therefore I am no true believer. This is a most mistaken conclusion. The question is whether thou canst heartily accept of Christ that thou mayst be pardoned, reconciled to God, and so saved. . . . This is justifying, saving faith."*

Trust in Jesus Christ for salvation is, then, the essence of Christian faith—that without which faith cannot be pronounced to be a saving grace,

* *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, part III. chap. x. I quote from an edition printed in 1662. The early editions of the *Saints' Rest* give ample evidence of the extent to which the identification of faith with assurance prevailed during the times of the Commonwealth (see previous note). Baxter (who was not free from heterodoxies of his own), in several of his works, but especially in this, returns again and again to the subject of an error which he justly regarded as of the most dangerous tendency. The modern abridgments of Baxter's *Saints' Rest*, which afford one little idea in any respect of the character of the original work, omit all reference to the author's innumerable protests against this error, though it is perhaps hardly less prevalent in our day than it was in Baxter's.

and with which, though far from perfect otherwise, faith is salvation. He that does not thus trust in Jesus Christ, however and whatever he may believe in other respects, is surely without that faith through which the sinner is justified, and by which the just lives. He that does so trust in Jesus Christ, however and whatever he may not believe in other respects, is surely one who "hath everlasting life," and "shall not come into condemnation," but is "passed from death unto life."

It remains to be added that, according to Scripture, any degree of such faith—even the weakest faith in Christ, so that it be true and sincere—is saving. On this point, as on another not unconnected with it, already referred to,* it is to be regretted that some of the most eminent of the Reformers did not always express themselves with due caution. Whatever they may have meant by "faith" itself (which we have found to be a question of some difficulty), they were accustomed to insist on not only a true but on a firm and undoubting faith, as not only desirable and attainable, but essential. Thus the 'Confessio Helvetica' defines Christian faith as being "*firmissima fiducia, et evidens ac constans animi assensus, denique certissima comprehensio veritatis Dei prepositæ in Scripturis;*"† and Calvin,

* See *ante*, p. 12.

† *Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum*, p. 47.

“Nunc justa fidei definitio nobis constabit si dicamus esse divinæ erga nos benevolentiae *firma* *certamque* cognitionem.”* To the same tendency formerly mentioned, to shun like the pestilence every approach to the peculiar errors of the teachers with whom they were in constant conflict, we must, of course, attribute expressions such as these on the part of the Reformers—expressions perhaps hardly less misleading than those of their opponents. It is remarkable, however, to find the same sort of language often employed in our own times, and especially to find it apparently (though not without some qualification) countenanced by so learned and able a writer as Bishop O’Brien, who defines faith not only as “trust in Christ, or in God through Christ,” but as “*an entire and unreserved* confidence, . . . *a full* reliance upon Him and upon

* *Institutio*, lib. III. cap. ii. sec. 7. The author of the *Institute*, certainly, often expressly recognises different degrees of faith as consistent with salvation (e.g., lib. IV. cap. xiv. sec. 7, 8); and in the explanations which immediately follow the definition of faith given above, he indeed says, in effect, that there may be a true faith which is not firm and certain: “*Nos certè, dum fidem docemus esse debere certam ac securam, non certitudinem aliquam imaginamur quæ nulla tangatur dubitatione, nec securitatem quæ nulla solicitudine impetratur: quin potius dicimus perpetuum esse fidelibus certamen cum sua ipsorum diffidentia, tantum abest ut eorum conscientias in placida aliqua quiete collocemus, quæ nullis omnino turbis interpelletur.*”—*Ibid. lib. III. cap. ii. sec. 17.*

His work."* To speak thus of the degree in which faith is found in any believer, as an essential quality of the grace itself, is surely as illogical as it is, I venture to think, unscriptural.

Enough will be said in the course of this work to show that a firm and undoubting faith—nay, faith every way in its highest state of development, even the "full assurance of faith" of the Epistle to the Hebrews,† is desirable, and ought to be aimed after by every believer in Christ.‡ But while the weak in faith ought not to be permitted to rest satisfied with their imperfect attainments, it is equally important that they should be preserved from a not less common and dangerous tendency to uncalled-for despondency and discouragement. Let us not venture to set

* *Nature and Effects of Faith*, p. 12. In a note to another passage the author says: "It has been objected to this passage that it seems to represent as essential to faith what really belongs to the principle only in its highest stage of advancement. This would be a serious mistake. . . . The only way in which such a passage can be open to such an objection is, that the individual elements [of faith] are spoken of in language which is rather appropriate to some of the more advanced than to the earlier stages of the principle, and which might give rise to the impression that in those earlier stages the principle was not really faith as truly as in its highest stage. I will not attempt to determine whether what I say is naturally calculated to lead to such a conclusion. . . . *In whatever degree it does so it misrepresents my real views. . . . I had no doubt that faith might be very weak, without being less real than if it were strong.*"—P. 56, note.

† *Heb. x. 22.*

‡ See ch. ii. and ch. viii.

narrower limits to the mercy of God than He hath himself done. "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?"* Why should it seem impossible to us that those who touch no more than the hem of Christ's garment may find that virtue goes forth from Him to heal them? The promises of Christ himself are without any such qualifying phrases as have just been quoted. For He said to Nicodemus, in words already referred to, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth*," not whosoever believeth much, but "*whosoever believeth in Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life."† In these words, in which there is a solemn announcement of the terms of the Gospel by the Redeemer himself, nothing was said of the "firmness and certainty" of our faith, nothing of an "entire and unreserved confidence." We have many examples, too, in the Evangelists, of the acceptance by our Lord as sufficient of faith that was very weak, even confessedly weak—as in the case of the man who, when told that all things were possible to him that believeth, "said with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief;"‡ and the question has indeed been expressly considered and authoritatively determined by St Paul in his Epistle to the Ro-

* Num. xxiii. 8.

† John iii. 16.

‡ Mark ix. 24.

mans. Writing to the members of the Church in Rome, Paul says, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye; . . . for God hath received him."*

The reason is obvious. It is not the merit of our faith, but the merit of Christ, that saves us.† "The meat taken with a paralytic and trembling hand will not refuse nourishment to the body any more than if it were taken with a strong and able arm. Faith is the hand of the soul, Christ is the food. Though this faith tremble, Christ trembleth not. The palsy is not in the food."‡

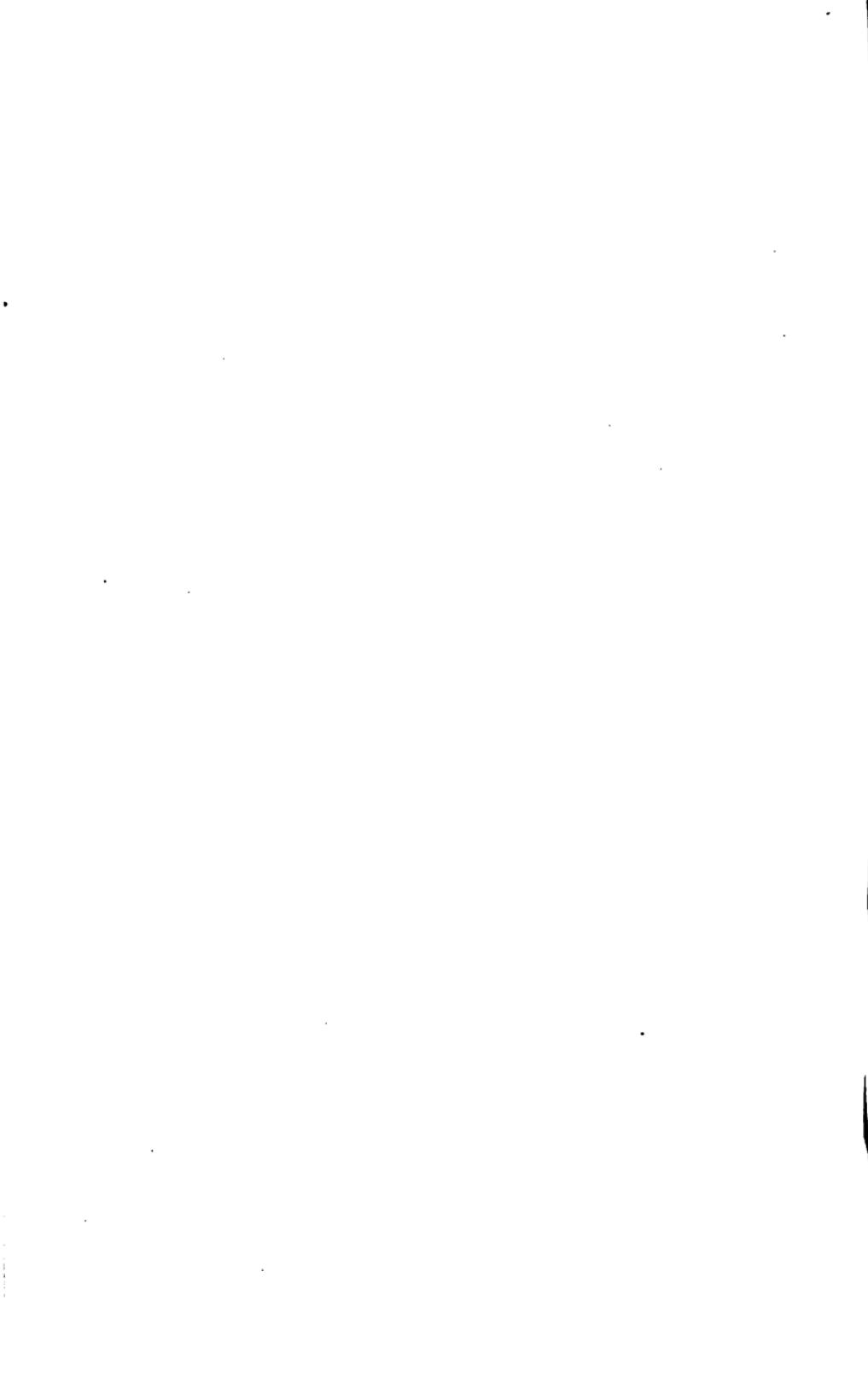
Such, then, is faith. I have attempted, certainly, only to describe faith in its essential qualities—those qualities which are essential to its existence as a saving grace. A complete exposition of the nature of faith, in the largest and most comprehensive meaning of the word, is no light undertaking, and has not been attempted

* Rom. xiv. 1, 3. As to the precise meaning of *ἀσθενῶντες* *τὴν πίστει* here, see chap. iv.

† "The grant of a pardon doth not depend upon the strength of faith. . . . Strong faith doth not entitle us to it because it is strong, or a feeble faith debar us from it because it is weak; but it is for the sake of a mighty Saviour that we are pardoned. 'Tis the same Christ that justifies thee as well as Abraham, the father of the faithful. 'Tis the same righteousness whereby thou art justified as well as Paul and the most beloved disciple."—Charnock's Discourses (1684), vol. ii. App. p. 113.

‡ Zachary Boyd's Last Battell of the Soule in Death, p. 141.

here. Even, however, several of its more important characteristics have not been referred to. Some of them will be noticed afterwards. I have spoken of its weakness: there may be and ought to be strong faith. I have spoken of it as looking to and leaning upon Christ: it ought to recognise and embrace the whole truth of which Christ is the centre. I have spoken of it especially as the instrument of the sinner's justification—as that which first introduces him into the number of the people of God: it is much more than the instrument of the sinner's justification: it is also the means through which the just lives. Only a part, indeed, could be told. For as in the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, so in the faith which comprehends and appropriates that love there is a height and depth, and length and breadth, which passeth knowledge: a fulness even like the fulness of Him who is at once the Author and the Finisher of our faith.



CHAPTER II.

OF THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE BELIEVER
FOR INCREASE OF FAITH.

"The things which God doth promise in His word are surer to us than anything we touch, handle, or see; but are we so sure and certain of them? . . . The strongest in faith that liveth upon the earth, hath always need to labour and strive and pray, that his assurance concerning heavenly and spiritual things may grow, increase, and be augmented."—HOOKER'S *Answer to Travers.*

CHAPTER II.

OF THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE BELIEVER FOR INCREASE OF FAITH.

WE find the Twelve, on one occasion, during our Lord's personal ministry, coming to their Master with the request, "Lord, increase our faith."* Nor have such aspirations been peculiar to the Apostles. What, for instance, is the greater part of the 119th Psalm but a series of fervent supplications for increase of faith? Or (to take another example out of the same book) how else shall we interpret such words as the following in the 25th Psalm:—"Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in Thee: let me not be ashamed. . . . Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation: on Thee do I wait all the day. . . . Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will He

* Luke xvii. 5.

teach sinners in the way. The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way. . . . What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall He teach in the way that He shall choose." Like aspirations are found in the hearts and upon the lips of multitudes of believers in our own day; many sincere disciples of Jesus Christ among ourselves having, indeed, no more earnest longing in the world than that the good Lord would be pleased to increase their faith.

That such desires should be felt, and such prayers uttered, is not to be regarded as in any way unaccountable in the actual circumstances of the case. They may often be, it is true, and doubtless often are, vague, indefinite, and uninformed—gropings in the dark for an escape from evils and the attainment of blessings, neither of which is clearly understood. They sometimes even originate in grave misapprehensions of the nature and offices of Christian faith, or in very erroneous assumptions as to the limits of human attainment. But we may ask aright when we know not what we ask; our mere intuitions (as they might seem) may be voices from God himself—instincts inspired by the Holy Spirit—and may have better reasons to justify them than can be discovered in the conclusions of our own understandings: they may be founded on surer

principles than we ourselves are able to explain articulately. And the consciousness of present defect, with the yearning for higher good than has yet been reached, which find utterance in the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith," however unintelligent they may occasionally be, or however much error may be mixed up with them, have, it is certain, a basis in the facts of Christian experience, and in the requirements and promises of Holy Scripture.

There is indeed both reason and unreason, both knowledge and ignorance, both truth and error, in the aspirations of the believer for increase of faith. Yet upon the whole these aspirations are well founded, and instead of being discouraged, they are to be regarded as no less natural than hopeful symptoms of the presence of spiritual life—symptoms of its presence in the soul, which it would be well to find more widely prevalent than they are.

That such is the true light in which to look upon them, will appear from a very little inquiry into the subject.

I. The first question which arises is easily disposed of; namely, How far the confessions or complaints so often made by believers in Christ as to the defects of their faith are justified by the facts of Christian experience?

Reference has been already made to the view of the nature of faith which is expressed in the definition that it is “*a firm and certain knowledge of God’s mercy towards us*,” or “*an entire and unreserved confidence in Him*.”* Though some writers, who define faith in this way, disclaim the inference that there can therefore be no *degrees* in a true faith, that inference appears to be almost inevitable, and is not unseldom deliberately accepted. It is accordingly often said expressly that a true faith does not admit of degrees; that there are only two states in which any man can be in relation to Christ: either he believes in Him with all his heart, or he is an unbeliever; that there is no medium between the highest possible faith on the one hand, and on the other hand infidelity; that faith, being trust in Christ, cannot be *less or more* at different times or in different men—to trust little being, in fact, not to trust at all; and, in short, that the faith of the true Christian is never imperfect or defective. The “*weak in faith*” of the Epistle to the Romans,† or men of “*little faith*,”‡ or persons who require to be established, or “*grounded and settled*,”§ in the faith, are, according to this view, merely believers of weak consciences, or imperfect information, or believers whose faith is inter-

* See chap. i.

† Rom. xiv. 1.

‡ Mat. xiv. 31; xvi. 8.

§ Col. i. 23.

mittent, liable to temporary obscuration, or at most believers whose faith has not given them as yet that courage and strength which it ought to produce. In fine, it is maintained that it is impossible to conceive of any man believing more or less in Christ; from whence it follows, that those who complain of the weakness of their faith, either complain without any reason, or ought to lament not the imperfection, but rather the non-existence of that grace, and seek not its increase, but its origination, within their souls.*

I venture to take a different view of the teaching of Scripture from that which has been now explained. I would neither unchristianise and place beyond the pale of salvation all whose faith is confessedly defective, nor exclude from the hope of higher attainments all who already truly believe unto salvation. It appears to me, on the

* See *ante*, p. 18. For a recent statement of the general view here referred to, see an article in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review for April 1868, in which the writer speaks of "the absurdity of pleading for degrees of certitude in faith," and says, *e.g.*, "Can we conceive of a person relying on Christ *more or less* for salvation? Or, supposing that one has committed to us some important trust, how would we feel were he to address us thus—'I trust you a *little* indeed, but I cannot say that I trust you *much*; I have no firm or complete reliance upon you?' Would not this amount in reality to a want [absence?] of trust?—Is this indeed all the trust that we have to give to Christ? The simplest Christian knows that this would not be faith."—P. 438.

contrary, to be the teaching of Scripture, that even genuine Christians *may* have more or less faith in every sense of that term, and that, in the case of many such persons, the grace in question is actually found in such a state of imperfect attainment as abundantly to justify them in seeking for its enlargement and furtherance.

In support of this opinion, it is almost enough to recapitulate what has been already said as to the nature of faith. Faith, as to its essence, is trust in Christ. But this is not by any means a complete definition of all that is included in a faith fully developed and matured. Thus it also includes a belief in the truth of the Christian revelation in which Christ is made known to us. It includes, further, a reception of the whole system of Christian doctrine—that doctrine which relates to the person, the work, the promises, and the law of Christ. It includes, further, submission to the divine will, whether as regards the provisions of grace or the administration of providence, and confidence in the power, wisdom, and goodness of God our Saviour in all things. It includes more than all this; but all this is at least included in it, not as in every detail essential to its existence, but as belonging to it in a state of full maturity. Need almost any more, I repeat, be said than thus to explain what faith is, to show how possible it is that men may have more or

less faith? Do all true Christians believe with equal firmness and constancy in the truth of the Christian revelation? or with equal intelligence and comprehensiveness of range in the doctrine of Christ? Or do all such persons with equal humility of mind submit to the will of God? or do they all possess equal confidence in His wisdom, power, and goodness? Do all of them even equally trust in Christ for salvation? Is there not amongst them less or more trust in Christ, as there is less or more trust in their fellow-men? Are there not in the case of some of them doubts and fears intermingled with their highest acts of faith, and that not only in times of extraordinary temptation, or as the result of other temporary influences, but *habitually*? To these questions I venture to think there can be but one reply. It is impossible certainly to doubt that some of those persons who in these respects acknowledge weakness of faith ought rather to confess its absence. They have not yet taken the initial step. In them faith is not only weak, but non-existent. They have the defects of faith without its reality; the weaknesses of the believer without his hold of the all-powerful Saviour. They have no conviction, no sentiment, no state of mind, no affection of the heart, which approaches to a true faith in Christ, and have still to begin the Christian life. Neither, however, on the other hand, is it

whatever may be the meaning of Scripture, that certain Christians may have more or less of grace than others, and that, in case of many such persons the grace in question is not such a state of imperfection as would render it useless them in spiritual enlargement and inheritance.

It seems to me natural, & almost in accordance with the best liberty in the nature of such facts, as that it is true of Christ. But this is not my argument at present, & all that I mean to say is, that any and natural inclusion of Christ in the truth of the word of God is made out, further, & especially, of the Christian doctrine—that **Christ** is the person, the work, the power of Christ. It includes, further, the divine will, whether as regards grace or the administration of confidence in the power of God our Saviour. In all more than all this, however, is included in it, we as to our knowledge, but as far as our knowledge goes.

less faith? Do all true Christians believe equal firmness and consistency in the truth of the Christian revelation? or has equal intelligence and comprehensiveness of scope in the *Book of Christ*? Or do all such persons not equal humility of mind submit to *Scripture*? But do they all possess equal evidence of the freedom, power, and goodness of God? Do all persons equally trust in Christ for salvation? Is there not amongst them less or more trust in the Master? Are there not in the uses of grace of the love and fear intermingled with this higher trust in faith, and that not only when it comes from temptation, or as the result of divine influences, but naturally? I venture to think that no man can be ignorant of the power of the love of God to subdue the natural propensities to sin, and the weakness of human nature to sin. The love of God is then the great power of salvation. They however who are ignorant of the love of God, and of the power of salvation by grace, are ignorant of the true meaning of the word of God, and of the true meaning of the word of God.

inusive faith. To every one (even the infidel) the gospel, is so far a truth shorn of so much doubtless, no part of which is made of Himself, either by ignorance or through injury to our

knowledge, only failed either in the extent of their faith, or in having believed less than they ought to have done. But

in the first part of the creed of the father of the church of Chaldea, he proceeded on the wing where he went. He saw the sun afar off; yet, as far as he knew it, he did not see the whole heart. And accordingly, we find that as long before as we live after him (except the Book of Job) before the publication of the Old Testament Scriptures—there is no instance of his having done so.

There is a certain centurion who appears to have been converted to Christianity during our Lord's residence in that country. He was a centurion of the detachment of Roman soldiers which garrisoned the garrison. He had, doubtless, been converted to Christianity, though he had become a proselyte to Judaism before our Lord's resurrection to our notice; but he was a simple soldier—a man who had enjoyed few religious advantages. His servant was sick, and he applied to our Lord for his sickness in words which, while striking and impressive, and showing great simplicity and earnestness of regard to the truth as far as he knew it, prove not

possible, I think, to doubt that other persons there are whose faith is far from being, in any of those respects here mentioned, so complete as it ought to be, and yet are true Christians.

Take the case of the Twelve as we find them during the whole period of our Lord's personal ministry. They were at that time certainly Christians, true disciples of Christ, and through Him children of God. Our Lord, praying to the Father, could say of them already, "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send me; they are Thine."* Yet they felt the need of more faith than they had; nor can any reader of the Gospels marvel that they should have prayed for its increase. The weakness of their faith in all respects continually, indeed, excites our astonishment, even when we are most careful to make due allowance for the circumstances in which they were placed: circumstances apparently, at first sight, more than usually favourable, but in fact in an extraordinary degree unfavourable,† to spiritual apprehensions of the truth and to spiritual growth generally. But not only was their faith very de-

* John xvii. 8, 9.

† Hare's *Mission of the Comforter*, vol. i. p. 1-30; and vol. ii. note A.

fective in their own estimation and in ours, but it was so also in the infallible judgment of our Lord himself, who frequently remonstrated with them on the subject.

It was at fault especially in these two ways: it was wanting in strength or intensity, and it was wanting in comprehensiveness. Whether it be inquired how they believed—that is, what was the *strength* of their faith; or what they believed—that is, what was the *extent* of their faith,—the answer is far from satisfactory. In other words, their faith was at once a weak faith and also a meagre, even a narrow, faith—a faith which, partly from ignorance, partly from the force of prejudice, had a very limited range. They trusted in Christ, but not with their whole hearts; they trusted in Christ, but their trust in Him failed to embrace (as it ought to have done) the whole of the truth as it is in Him. Of the former defect the conduct of Peter on the occasion of the miracle of our Lord's walking on the sea, and that of the same apostle, as well as the others (to say nothing of Judas), during the night preceding the crucifixion, are familiar illustrations.* In proof of the latter, it may be sufficient to recall those words of our Lord, spoken in the very last days of His earthly ministry, in which He told the Twelve that He had yet many things to say to

* Mat. xiv. 28-31; xxvi. 56, 69.

them which they could not then bear*—that is, that at that time they were neither instructed in nor capable of receiving many parts of His doctrine.

Even had they failed in only one or other of these respects, it would have been so far a serious drawback from the completeness of their faith in Christ. Which is best: to believe much, or many things? The answer is, that both are best. An intense faith is desirable, but a comprehensive faith is also to be desired. It is better, certainly, to believe only the fundamental truths of the Gospel, but to believe them with all our hearts, than to believe more doctrines with less cordial assent and feebler conviction. That is to say, the religious state even of a man who knows little more than that Christ is the Saviour of sinners, but who believes in that faithful saying as he believes in his own existence, and who consequently trusts in Christ for salvation with his whole heart, is a higher state of the religious life than that of the most accomplished theologian, familiar with the whole system of doctrinal Christianity, but whose faith has lost in intensity what it has gained in range.† But *both* are best—both

* John xvi. 12.

† Abraham, for instance, believed in the faithfulness of God. He believed that the Lord was a God whom he might trust. It is difficult for us to speak with confidence of the spiritual state of a man living under so different a dispensation, but such appears

an intense faith and a comprehensive faith. To believe in Christ apart from any one (even the least) of the doctrines of the Gospel, is so far a maimed faith—faith in a Saviour shorn of so much of His glory. There is, doubtless, no part of the revelation which God has made of Himself, of the use of which we can, either by ignorance or unbelief, deprive ourselves without injury to our souls.

Had the Apostles, therefore, only failed either in the strength or in the extent of their faith, they must have been held to have believed less perfectly than they ought to have done. But

to have been almost the whole extent of the creed of the father of the faithful. As he went out from Chaldea, he proceeded on his way through the world, not knowing where he went. He saw the day of Christ only, as it were, afar off; yet, as far as he knew God, he believed in Him with his whole heart. And accordingly, this man—living not only almost as long before as we live after Christ, but (unless perhaps we except the Book of Job) before the date of even the earliest book of the Old Testament Scriptures—is held up for ever to all Christendom as an eminent example of a true faith.

So it was, again, with a certain centurion who appears to have been quartered in Capernaum during our Lord's residence in that city—probably the commandant of the detachment of Roman soldiers which formed the garrison. He had, doubtless, been originally an idolater, though he had become a proselyte to Judaism before his introduction to our notice; but he was a simple soldier, without learning—a man who had enjoyed few religious advantages. His servant was sick, and he applied to our Lord for the removal of his sickness in words which, while striking and characteristic, and showing great simplicity and earnestness of conviction in regard to the truth as far as he knew it, prove not

they failed in both. Nor was their unbelief only shown in these forms, but in many others. They were not even without some incredulity as to the Messiahship of Christ. "With regard to Christianity," says Bishop Butler, "it will be observed that there is a middle, between a full satisfaction of the truth of it and a satisfaction of the contrary. The middle state of mind between these two consists in a serious apprehension that it may be true, joined with doubt whether it is so."* Was there not even something of this "middle state of mind," as to the very truth of Christ's claims to a divine mission at all, in men like Philip, who could say, "Show us the Father, less clearly how very elementary his knowledge was. He sent, we are told, a message to Jesus in the following terms: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." This may be described as his profession of faith. It is evidently the profession of a devout and strongly impressed soldier, rather than that of an accomplished theologian; a character, indeed, to which the centurion made no pretensions. It is the profession of a man who had seized with firm grasp the central truth of Christianity, but who had little even of the knowledge of Scripture, which was familiar as their own names to hundreds of the Jewish followers of our Lord. Yet what are we told? "When Jesus heard these things, He turned Him about, and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

* Analogy, part ii. concl.

and *it sufficeth us?*"—an admission of remaining incertitude which called forth from our Lord almost the same reproof, both in form and in spirit, as that which He had shortly before addressed to the unbelieving Jews, when they said, "How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."*

So much with regard to the Twelve. It could not be supposed that their experience was in this respect abnormal—an experience never to occur again in the history of the Church of Christ. It certainly *was* repeated in the case of many of their immediate successors in discipleship, the early Christians of the apostolical Churches, whose spiritual history is so well known to us through the canonical Epistles, and especially the Epistles of St Paul. We have little direct evidence as to the inner life of the members of these Churches; but abundant materials are afforded for forming an opinion on that subject in the counsels, the reproofs, the warnings which were addressed to them in writings in which are reflected, as in a mirror, the whole religious life of the Church of the period—its prevalent opinions, its ecclesiastical government, its forms of worship, its social relations and personal experiences, its trials and difficulties, its prominent virtues and besetting sins. Nothing indeed could be more

* Conf. John xiv. 8-11 with John xii. 24-38.

clear and full than the view which may thus be obtained of the state of the primitive Christians of the time of St Paul; and amongst other things we see in the inspired writings in question the character of their faith. I will not go into details in this place. It may be enough to say that (to revert to a distinction just noticed) whether as regards the strength and intensity or the enlightenment and comprehensiveness with which they believed in Christ, there were men in the Churches of Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Galatia who, though acknowledged as true Christians, yet for a longer or shorter period of their lives had in these respects not less reason than the Twelve to pray for the increase of their faith.

And what shall be said of other times? What, for instance, of our own days? There is great faith, faith great every way, now as then. Is there not also weak faith—faith every way weak? How many are there who, while they afford good evidence of the sincerity of their professed reliance upon Christ for salvation, have not only all the defects of faith which Peter or Thomas or the other Apostles ever suffered from, but might envy the simple confidence in their Master—the deference to His authority, the ardent affection to His person, which even in their worst days shone forth in the lives of the humblest of these peasants and fishermen of Galilee!

As to defects of faith, indeed, being found in true Christians, what man's faith is altogether perfect? Who has there been in any age of the Church of whom it could be said that he had an absolutely perfect faith in Christ? Alas! the distinction between him who is greatest and him who is least in the kingdom of God, is in this respect, as others, only a distinction in degree. The difference is but a difference of more or less imperfection. And the most faithful follower of Christ, the furthest advanced in the divine life, in those times when his faith is in most vigorous exercise, has reason, when he makes the confession, "Lord, I believe!" to add to it the prayer, "Help mine unbelief!"

II. Assuming, however, that faith may be true and yet weak—a truth which is, both happily and unhappily, indisputable—another question arises out of the aspirations of the believer for its increase; namely, What is the use of more faith to any man who already truly believes in Christ? Let him even be the least in the kingdom of God: ought he not to be content that he has at least crossed the boundary-line, and is a fellow-citizen of the saints? Are there good reasons on account of which any true believer in the Saviour, even the feeblest of those who have fled to Him for refuge, should be dissatisfied with

his position, and should aim after its improvement? *

Now the answer, I think, is, that there are good reasons.

It is true that believers themselves often mistake the grounds on which any dissatisfaction with their own faith, however defective it may be, is alone justifiable. Nay, their aspirations for higher attainments are often inspired by serious misapprehensions on the whole subject. Thus, it is a delusion under which many good men labour, that even their *security* depends upon the greatness of their faith rather than—as is the true state of the case—on the greatness of the merits of their Redeemer. Weakness of faith is regarded by them not only as an evil, but as a fatal defect; strong

* Sir Thomas Browne says, “It is, I protest, beyond my ambition to aspire unto the first ranks; my desires only are, and I shall be happy therein, to be but the last man, and bring up the rear in heaven.”—*Religio Medici*, part i. sec. 58. Which, however, is preferable—such a spirit, or that expressed in words like the following, from the ‘Dying Thoughts’ of Richard Baxter?—“For what should my soul more pray than for a clearer and stronger faith? I believe; Lord, help my unbelief! I have many a time groaned to Thee under the burden of this remnant of darkness and unbelief. . . . I have cried to Thee night and day, ‘Lord, increase my faith.’ I have written and spoken that to others which might be most useful to myself, to raise the apprehensions of faith yet higher. But yet, Lord, how dark is this world! . . . O Father of Lights, who givest wisdom to them that ask it of Thee, shut not up this sinful soul in darkness! Leave me not to grope in unsatisfied doubts at the door of the celestial light!”—*Works*, vol. iii. p. 873.

faith not only as a desirable attainment, but as an attainment without which there is no salvation : an attainment, indeed, without which they must conclude that they are yet in their sins, having neither part nor lot in the Gospel, but being still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. Any distrust—however partial, or even momentary —of the all-sufficiency of the Saviour ; any incompleteness of their knowledge of the truth ; any hesitation in accepting the least of the articles of Christian doctrine ; any incredulity or incertitude which may remain in their minds, or may find harbour there for a moment, as to the evidences ; any failure of unreserved submission to the Divine will, or loss of courage and fortitude even under the heaviest trials,—is looked upon by them as evidence that they are still without God and without hope. And when they ask for more faith than they have, their real thought is that as long as there remains any weakness or infirmity in their convictions, or belief, or submission to God, or trust in Christ, their souls are yet in peril of perdition.

After what has been already said * on the subject, I need hardly repeat that this *is* an utter delusion, and one of a very grave character. No such reason exists why any man who truly puts his trust in Christ, however weak his faith in

* See *ante*, p. 18.

many respects may be, should seek higher attainments in that grace, as that a weak faith is incompatible with, or a strong faith indispensable to, the security of the soul. Nor is the assumption now referred to only erroneous ; it is a mischievous and dangerous error. It is the cause of needless and intolerable anxiety and distress of mind to many persons who, instead of bemoaning their own state as desperate, ought to be rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. And it has the even more disastrous result in the case of others—men secretly indisposed to religion—of affording them a pretext—a pretext of which they are too ready to avail themselves—for an indefinite postponement of their first entrance upon the life of faith.

If, however, false reasons may sometimes be imagined, true reasons there are for dissatisfaction with weak, and aspirations after strong and great, faith in Christ. The sick man, filled with unrest, feeble, dispirited, in constant suffering, may ignorantly imagine himself a prey to supposititious maladies, and exposed to dangers which have no existence except in his own imagination. He may be the victim of illusions ; a hypochondriac ; one whose distemper is as much in the mind as in the body. It is not the less true, however, that the man is sick, and that he has good cause to pine for more vigorous health. So even those who long

for a better faith, on supposed grounds which are in fact mere phantasies of a morbid imagination, might doubtless find that their aspirations are more reasonable than they themselves are aware of.

There are, in truth, many and important reasons for the most earnest endeavours after increase of faith on the part of as many as are yet in any degree deficient in this respect in Christian attainment.

Thus, (1.) To believe not partially, but wholly, not fearfully, but with all our hearts, is at least our duty to God—all unbelief, much or little, being, as far as it goes, sin. On the same principle, therefore, according to which every Christian is bound, as a matter of duty, to aim continually after the highest attainments in a conformity to the will of God in other respects, he is bound to aim after the highest attainments in faith.

(2.) A great faith is indispensable as a means of enabling the believer to live a holy life. On this point, which involves principles lying at the very foundation of Christian doctrine, it will be necessary to enter a little more in detail.

It can hardly be necessary to bring forward any elaborate argument for the purpose of showing that faith in Jesus Christ is the great means through which the Christian is enabled to live a holy life. Every one knows that faith occupies a wide and extensive field of influence in the Chris-

tian system, and fulfils numerous and varied offices. How far the precise nature and extent of its operations are clearly understood, and how far misapprehensions on this subject are the cause of prevalent errors, I shall not here inquire. There can be no doubt as to the doctrine of Scripture. Faith is, first of all and chiefly, the instrument through which men obtain pardon and acceptance with God for the sake of the merits of Christ. But it is much more than this. It is required not only for justification, but also for sanctification.* In other words, it is not only the means through which we first obtain an entrance into spiritual life, but it is also the means through which spiritual life is maintained and promoted. The whole Christian life is indeed a life of faith. It was by

* Some of the most dangerous heresies are one-sided statements of important truths. Mr Erskine's view of the place occupied by faith in the Christian system is as follows : "The use of faith is, not to remove the penalty, or to make the pardon better—for the penalty is removed, and the pardon is proclaimed, whether we believe it or not—but to give the pardon a moral influence, by which it may heal the spiritual diseases of the heart ; which influence it cannot have, in the nature of things, unless it is believed. . . . Men are not, according to the Gospel system, pardoned on account of their belief in the pardon, but they are sanctified by a belief of the pardon.—*Essays on the Freeness of the Gospel*, p. 22. The truth, as it appears to me, is as stated above ; not that faith does not justify and only sanctifies, but *that it both justifies and sanctifies* ; or, in other words, that, being "justified by faith," the believer also "lives the life which he lives in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. ii. 20).

faith that Abraham obeyed God; that Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; that Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephtha, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."* And it is by faith—that is, by looking unto Jesus—that all Christians are enabled to "run with patience the race that is set before them."† I believe in Jesus Christ. I put my trust in Him as the Lord my righteousness and my Redeemer. He has invited me to come to Him, and I go to Him—perhaps in much ignorance and even unbelief—but I obey His gracious call, and go to Him. The moment‡ I take the decisive step of thus placing my reliance upon the Saviour, God is pleased, by a judicial sentence,§ to pardon my

* Heb. xi. 8; 24, 25; 32-34.

† Heb. xii. 2.

‡ Rom. v. 1, viii. 1; Heb. iii. 6. A discussion of the question "whether any other act of faith besides the first act has any concern in our justification," will be found in Jonathan Edwards's well-known sermon on Justification by Faith alone. See also Owen's Doctrine of Justification by Faith, chap. v. sec. 2.

§ Rom. viii. 33; 1 Cor. vi. 11; Acts xiii. 38, 39, &c. Even writers like Bull, who attempt to explain away the doctrine connected with it, admit the forensic meaning of the verb δικαιόω, as used in the New Testament. Thus the writer now named, after

sins and accept me as righteous in His sight, for the sake of the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to me.* That is to say, I am, in theological language, "justified." I am no longer under condemnation.† Perhaps I may as yet remain ignorant of my happiness in this respect, but in the sight of God I am no longer under condemnation. I have passed from death unto life.‡ It has been said of me by the heavenly Father, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."§ I am from that moment in a state of entire security. Nothing can thenceforward "separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord: neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come."|| Is the whole work of faith done, however, when I first put my trust in Jesus Christ, and for His sake receive pardon and acceptance? Has it attained the purposes for which it was called into existence, and finished the work which was given it to do? Has it nothing more to do? These questions

citing a number of texts in which the signification is unmistakable, says, "Pro certo igitur statuatur, vocabulum *justificationis* in hac materia forensem significationem obtinere, atque actionem designare Dei, more judicis, ex lege Christi gratiosa absolvientis accusatum, justum pronuntiantis, atque ad præmium justitiae, *h.e.* vitam æternam, acceptantis."—Harmonia Apostolica, Dissertatio Prior, cap. i. sec. 6; see also Nature and Effects of Faith, note L.

* Rom. iv. 5, 6. † Rom. viii. 1, 34. ‡ John v. 24.

§ Luke xv. 32. || Rom. viii. 38, 39.

have been already answered. The whole work of faith is not done, but only begun. I have been with it at the mercy-seat. I must now go forth with it into the world, to fulfil, through the strength which it secures for me, my work ; and through the same strength to overcome my temptations and endure my trials. For “this is the victory which overcometh the world, *even our faith.*”*

Now that a great faith is at all events required for this purpose—that is, for the purpose of enabling the Christian to live a holy life, and to attain to higher and higher conformity to the will of God—is abundantly evident alike from Scripture and experience. It is written, that “Him that is weak in the faith . . . God hath received.” But is it written that he that *continues* weak in the faith “overcometh the world,” or can fulfil aright his duties, in the midst of the urgent and vigorous temptations, and almost insupportable trials and sorrows, of life? Never. Above all, is it ever said that he that *continues* weak in the faith can yet advance as he ought to do in holy living, or *work out* his own sanctification? Never. On the contrary, we are said to be sanctified “by the truth”†—that is, the truth received by faith into our hearts; and “growth in grace” is invariably associated with “growth

* 1 John v. 4.

† John xvii. 17.

in the knowledge"—that is, in the believing knowledge—"of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

The child lives no less than the man. Its weakness is life no less than his strength. But the child's weakness is not sufficient for the man's work: for the wear and tear, the labours, the trials, the conflicts, the pursuits and aims of the man. It must increase in wisdom and stature. Its pulse must beat more strongly; its joints must be more firmly knitted; the muscular fibre of its limbs must be hardened; its mind must be informed and cultivated; its whole nature must attain greater development before it can be prepared to take that place for which it is destined in the world.

(3.) The only other thing which I shall notice, as affording good reason for the desire for high attainments in faith, is the believer's own comfort and happiness. Neither peace and joy in believing, nor a confirmed and well-founded assurance of the divine favour, and a sure hope of eternal life, are of the essence of faith; but there is no doubt, from the language of Scripture, that they usually accompany faith in its more advanced stages;† and that in some men, and under some circumstances, they may even (and without suspicion of fanaticism or morbid excitement) attain

* 2 Peter iii. 18.

† See *post*, chap. viii.

to an extraordinary pitch of intensity and elevation.* That they are truly desirable is equally certain. Such faith as many persons seem alone to have—a faith which has vitality enough to disturb, but not enough force to give peace to the conscience; a faith which requires of a man the arduous duties, and exposes him to the painful trials and sacrifices of the Christian life, without securing for him its hopes and consolations; a faith which shuts him out from the pleasures of the world, but fails to open for him the gates of the tabernacles of the righteous, where he hears from afar the voice of salvation and rejoicing, that he may go into them and praise the Lord,† is certainly not the faith which any one, without a struggle for something better, ought to be content to live with and to die with.

* “The sacred oracles,” says Robert Hall of Leicester, in his preface to the Memoirs of Mr John Janeway, “afford no countenance to the supposition that devotional feelings are to be condemned as visionary and enthusiastic, merely on account of their intenseness and elevation; provided they be of a right kind, and spring from legitimate sources, they never teach us to suspect that they can be carried too far.” He adds, however: “Let me be permitted to observe, that the experience of Mr Janeway in his last moments, while it develops the native tendency of Christianity, is not to be considered as a standard to ordinary Christians. He affords a great example of what is attainable in religion, and not of what is indispensably necessary to salvation. Thousands die in the Lord who are not indulged with the privilege of dying in triumph.”—Memoirs of John Janeway, preface.

† Psalm cxviii.

III. One other question remains to be considered in this place. It may be very briefly referred to. I mean the question, How far there is any encouragement or hope of success, to men who, conscious of the weakness of their own faith, aspire for higher attainments in that grace?

I will not here anticipate those statements bearing upon this question which must be made in detail in subsequent chapters. In the mean time it may be sufficient to remember that very high attainments are and have been reached by other men, and cannot therefore be regarded by any of us as impossible.

Of course, it is not to be supposed all our aspirations, without exception, will be realised. Many of them arise from unreasonable expectations, and expectations unwarranted by Holy Scripture. James and John asked that they might sit the one on the right hand and the other on the left hand of the Son of man in His kingdom. They knew not what they asked. It is natural and inevitable that at the beginning of their Christian course, imperfectly instructed, and without experience, even true believers should often fall into mistakes of judgment as to the precise manner in which increase of faith would be useful to them, and therefore should, in this respect, ask amiss, and ask in vain.

Perhaps, for instance, they may look for the

actual attainment of faith in a degree of perfection which in fact is, in the present life, by all men unattainable. It is impossible, certainly, to make our aim too high ; and very great faith, as we have found, has been, and may be, reached, nay, may be required, even by believers who are still in the flesh. That in this life, however, the graces even of the most advanced Christian are always darkened by many imperfections, is a truth which cannot be too carefully kept in view by us ; not, certainly, that it may discourage our efforts after the greatest intenseness and elevation of faith, but that it may moderate our expectations of entire success in this life.

Other believers again, already oftener than once referred to, demand with too exclusive and urgent an importunacy that kind of increase of faith—if so it may be called—which will secure for them confidence in their own interest in Christ. Like Luther shut up in his cell in the convent of Erfurth, the great longing of their souls is to have the assurance of their own salvation.* Whether assurance of grace be of the nature of faith or not, is a point which is considered elsewhere.† I believe it is not of the nature of faith, but rather one of the blessed fruits which, in some cases, result from the possession of this grace. No doubt it is

* D'Aubigné, Hist., book III. chap. iv.

† See *post*, chap. viii.

intimately connected with increase of faith; for the stronger and more intelligent our faith in Christ, we shall be the better prepared to arrive at the conclusion that we ourselves have been forgiven, and are in a state of salvation. No doubt, also, such an assurance is a blessing to be desired and sought after;* and one which is sometimes granted, especially (like all great faith) in circumstances of more than ordinary trial.† Perhaps, however, even so excellent a gift may be aimed after too importunately and too exclusively. Some Christian believers, doubtless, seek for assurance of their own safety as if their safety de-

* 2 Peter i. 10; 2 Cor. xiii. 5; 1 John v. 13.

† “That the faith of assurance has existed I have no doubt. . . . That the Apostles were evangelically assured of their own piety and consequent salvation, must be admitted by all who believe the Scriptures. . . . From the accounts given us concerning the first martyrs, I cannot hesitate to admit that they also were the subjects of the same faith. . . . Indeed I am persuaded that this blessing is much more frequently experienced in times and places of affliction and persecutions, than in seasons of peace and prosperity. . . . God, in His infinite mercy, furnishes His children with peculiar support and consolation in times of peculiar trial. As their day is, so He causes their strength to be. Among the means of consolation enjoyed by Christians, none seems better adapted to furnish them with the necessary support under severe distresses than the assurance that they are children of God. Accordingly, this very consolation appears to have been given to the suffering saints of the Old and New Testament as a peculiar support to them in their peculiar trials. From analogy it might be concluded . . . that the same blessing has been given in times of eminent affliction to saints in every succeeding age of the Church.”—Dwight’s Theology, vol. iv. p. 98.

pended on their assurance rather than on Christ, and as if it were not even possible (which I am persuaded Scripture teaches us it is) that in certain cases it may be the will of God, for their own good, that even His true people should, for a time at least, perhaps all their lives, in this respect "walk in darkness and have no light." *

As far, however, as a great faith is truly required by any man, he has doubtless this reason to hope for its attainment, that such adequate faith has been attained by other men through that grace which is alike offered to us all.

Take, for instance, the case of the Christian martyrs.

I do not say, certainly, that every man of ordinary experiences either can or needs to attain to the faith of those holy persons who bore testimony with their blood to the strength of their convictions in times of persecution: a faith which was not only more tried, but for that very reason better disciplined, than the faith of most other

* "There seems to be a plain and important reason why most Christians should be left in some degree of uncertainty concerning this subject. In all the earlier stages of their piety, and in all other cases in which it is not eminently vigorous, they would be prone, if they possessed high consolatory evidence—especially if they possessed full assurance of their renovation, imperfect as they always are—to settle quietly down in that imperfect state. . . . As the case now is, their fears serve to quicken them no less than their hopes; and by the influence of both they continue to advance in holiness to the end of life."—Dwight's Theology, vol. iv. p. 110.

men. What we require is, to have enough faith for our own lesser, as they had for their greater, trials; enough faith *for our own work* in the world. The case of the martyrs shows, at least, that faith may be (as it ought to be) an operative principle, strong enough to fit every man for such sacrifices and duties as are required of him, however onerous and of whatever nature these may be.

Their history has been so often told, and is made up of incidents which appeal so powerfully to the imagination, that we seem to be actual spectators of their sufferings and their constancy. We see them before our very eyes. There are aged men among them to whom the sentence of the judge only gives a more glorious, if a more painful, close to a life already condemned by nature, and made burdensome by manifold infirmities.* But in the crowd—for, on the lowest computation, the numbers must have been very great†—are also to be seen youths and maid-

* “The blessed Pothinus, Bishop of Lyons, upwards of ninety years of age, and very infirm and asthmatic, yet strong in spirit, and panting after martyrdom, was dragged before the tribunal, his body worn out with age and disease.”—Milner, *History*, cent. II. chap. vi. See also, *e. g.*, the martyrdom of Polycarp, *ibid.* chap. v.

† See Gibbon’s *History*, chap. xvi., with M. Guizot’s note as to the number of martyrs in the ten years’ persecution under Diocletian. For this persecution, Gibbon, by a rough calculation, estimates the whole number at “somewhat less than two thousand

ens;* mothers with infants in their arms;† strong men in the vigour of their days, full of life and of its interests and hopes;—in short, all sorts of persons to whom life is sweetest and death most terrible.‡ They are of all ranks and conditions, too—masters and slaves, the peasant from his remote village and quiet habits of life, the man of business from the crowded city, the soldier from the prætorium, bishops and presbyters; all grades of society find their representatives in this devoted

persons;” a number, however, which M. Guizot shows to have been exceeded in previous persecutions, which are represented by Gibbon himself as less severe. Of course, the Christians who suffered death under Diocletian, or indeed during the whole of the three first centuries, are not alone to be taken into account. Among martyrs to the faith are even to be included many of the sufferers from those severities “inflicted by Christians on each other,” which Gibbon sets against what he calls the “zeal” of the Roman Emperors; severities, according to his own authority, Grotius, which in the Netherlands alone, and in a single reign, cost more than one hundred thousand lives.

* Neander's History, vol. i. p. 207, &c.

† See, for instance, the touching accounts of the martyrdom at Carthage of Perpetua (“two-and-twenty years of age, who was a mother with her child at the breast”), and Felicitas, whose child was born between the day of her condemnation and that on which she was torn to pieces by the wild beasts, in Neander, vol. i. p. 170-176. Milton's sonnet on the persecutions by the “bloody Piedmontese,”

“Who rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks,”

is familiar evidence that such cruelties were not peculiar to the heathen.

‡ Ibid. p. 117-213.

band, which consists not of heroes and demigods, but of men and women of like passions, and previously in like circumstances, with ourselves.* We see them as waiving aside the proffered pardon—for they refuse to purchase even life itself, however dear it must be to many of them, by apostacy—they are led away to the several dooms which the cruel ingenuity of their persecutors has prepared for them: to the sword; to the cross, like their Master; to the heaped faggots with the torch already lighted; to the arena of the crowded amphitheatre, and its caged lions waiting with impatient roar and glaring eyes for the signal which will let them loose on new victims; to the horrible stake and chain fixed in the sands within reach of the slowly advancing tide; to the dizzy brow of the precipice: to these, and to other deaths not less appalling, some of them deaths of nameless atrocity.† We see their noble bearing when brought face to face with death; their free-

* Pliny, in his letter to Trajan (Pliny, l. x. ep. 97), speaks of many of all ages, of every rank, and both sexes, as being among the accused, adding that the contagion of the Christian superstition had seized not only cities, but also the villages and open country.

† Details will be found in Eusebius which are *necessarily* omitted in modern histories. As to the amount of suffering see even Gibbon, chap. xvi. Some of the tortures inflicted on the victims of Nero's persecution, described by Tacitus, are represented by that historian as exciting public commiseration even in Rome.—Ann., lib. XV. cap. xliv.

dom alike from excitement and depression ; their fearlessness, not unmixed with humility ;* their sympathy for the weaker brethren† (for such there are) : a bearing every way worthy of the cause for which they are about to suffer, and not unbefitting persons the humblest of whom feel that in their conduct the glory of the Saviour himself is at stake. The crowd closes round them. At intervals, however, may still be heard the voice of prayer and psalms‡ mingling with cries extorted from failing nature by agonies which, though they destroy the flesh, are powerless to overthrow the faith. And now the shout of the onlookers proclaims that the sacrifice has been completed. They have been faithful even unto death. They have not counted their lives dear to them that they might finish their course with joy.

Nor has great faith been confined to these men or their times. Many a life, indeed, is as truly a

* "Two of these [martyrs at Lyons]—Porticus, a youth of fifteen, and Blandina, a young woman—whom they attempted at first to intimidate by making them witness the sufferings of the others, and then to shake from their constancy by exhausting upon them all their means of torture, created universal astonishment at what God's power could effect in such weak and tender vessels. Although the intoxication of enthusiasm is capable of producing such extraordinary phenomena, yet the enthusiasm of these martyrs was distinguished by those true marks, *a sobriety and a humility indicating the sense of weakness*, and by love and gentleness."—Neander, vol. i. p. 155.

† *Ibid. et passim.*

‡ *Ibid. vol. i. p. 207, &c.*

martyrdom as any death ever was. Nay, to live in conformity with the faith of Christ is often more difficult than to die for it. The greatest faith is not alone found in persons whose histories are before the world. How many of us, even within the sphere of their own observation, know of men "never heard of half a mile from home," whose faith is at least not inferior to that of saints whose praises are in all the Churches of Christ!

And what others have been by the divine grace, why may we not also hope to become?

In all these circumstances, the aspirations of which I have been speaking throughout this chapter are more than justified. Not to possess them would be unnatural: it would be monstrous. There are only two sorts of persons, says Pascal, who can be called reasonable: "Those who serve God with all their heart because they know Him, or those who seek Him with all their heart because they know Him not." And then he adds, "But as for those who live without knowing Him and without seeking Him, they judge themselves so little worthy of their own care, that they are not worthy to be cared for by others; and one must have all the charity of the religion which they despise, not to despise them so much as to abandon them to their folly."* If such language was justly used in regard to unbelievers content

* *Pensees* (Faugere's ed.), tome ii. p. 13.

with their unbelief, what might be said of believers themselves who, not believing the whole truth with their whole hearts, should fail with their whole hearts to seek for more faith—if such a case be indeed conceivable! Is it conceivable? May we not tremble for the spiritual condition of any man who, having to his own knowledge at best weak and imperfect faith, does not strive by every means, and make it one of his most importunate prayers, night and day, to Almighty God, that he may receive increase of faith?



CHAPTER III.

THAT FAITH IS CAPABLE OF INCREASE.

“Aiunt meliorem fidem nostram fieri non posse, si bona est; non enim esse fidem nisi quæ inconcussè, firmiter, indistractè Dei misericordiæ innititur. Quibus satius fuerat cum Apostolis orare ut Dominus sibi augeret fidem, quæm talem fidei perfectionem securè obtendere, quæm nemo unquam ex filiis hominum assequutus est, nemo assequetur in hac vita. . . . Gloriatbatur ille, se discendo fieri senem. Nos igitur ter miseri Christiani, si nihil proficiendo, senes simus, quorum fides per omnes ætatum gradus progredi debet, donec adolescat in virum perfectum.”—CALVIN, *Instit.* lib. IV. c. xiv. sec. 7, 8.

CHAPTER III.

THAT FAITH IS CAPABLE OF INCREASE.

WE have found what faith is as to its essential qualities ; those qualities without which true and saving faith does not exist, and with which, faith, however defective otherwise, is true and saving. We have also found that faith, even in the case of sincere believers in Christ, may long remain (according to their own apprehensions, and in fact) very incomplete ; incomplete even in comparison with the faith of other men : so that they themselves, indeed, have often no more earnest desire or heartfelt prayer than for increase of faith. But is it possible for faith to pass from the lower state into the higher ? Does faith admit of progress ? Is it capable of increase ?

That faith is capable of increase is a truth so evident, not only from particular texts, but from the whole scope and tenor of Scripture, as hardly to require argument, were it not that even the

66 *That Faith is capable of Increase.*

first principles of religion often appear doubtful to those whose encouragement is here chiefly in view. Its evidence is to be found in the very nature and constitution of the Christian life: that life of which faith is so important an element, and which, upon the whole, and in all its parts, is essentially, and by its very nature and constitution, a life of progress.

Thus St Paul, speaking not of himself only, but of himself as a pattern and representative of all believers: “ I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: . . . and . . . that I may win Christ, and be found in Him. . . . Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect;* but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, for-

* That the words *οὐχ θτι ἡδη ἔλαβον ἡ ἡδη τετελείωμαι*, do not refer to “the resurrection from the dead,” as Whitby and others have supposed, and as appears to be countenanced in the authorised version by the unfortunate use of the same English verb, to translate *ἔλαβον* and *κατετέλθω* (see Conybeare and Howson, ii. p. 527, note); but that they look back to “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,” and the gaining Christ and being found in Him, of verse 8, see Alford’s Greek Testament *in loc.*, and Bloomfield (Greek Testament, *in loc.*), who, however, renders them (supplying the ellipsis), “ Not that I mean to say I have already attained [the certainty of salvation].” Ellicott’s reading is, “ Not that I have already attained [the prize], or am already made [spiritually] perfect.” See his *Philippians, in loc.*

getting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

There is some difficulty in the interpretation of particular expressions in this passage and its context. No doubt, however, can, I think, be entertained as to its general scope and meaning; and, especially, no doubt that the Apostle intends here to describe the Christian life as a life of progress.

The whole language of Scripture is in the same spirit. Everywhere the idea of progress, as regards spiritual life, is predominant. The least of seeds becomes the greatest of herbs.† The seed springeth and groweth up, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.‡ The shining light shineth more and more unto the perfect day.§ The new-born babe desires the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby.|| And the child speaking as a child, thinking as a child, and understanding as a child, becomes a man, and puts away childish things.¶ Immaturity and weakness at one period, followed sooner or later, and through various processes of change, by ripeness and strength: such is the Christian life, not exceptionally, but normally—

* Philip. iii. 8-14.

† Mat. xiii. 31.

‡ Mark iv. 26.

§ Prov. iv. 18.

|| 1 Peter ii. 2.

¶ 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

in its very nature and essence—according to the whole tenor as well as the express language of Scripture.

It may be added that the same principle holds everywhere as the law of all life. “From our being born into the present world, in the helpless, imperfect state of infancy, and having arrived from thence to mature age, we find it,” says Bishop Butler, “to be a general law of nature in our own species, that the same creatures, the same individuals, should exist in different degrees of life and perception.” He goes on to say that “in other creatures the same law holds.”* And again, “Thus much is manifest, that the whole natural world and government of it is a . . . progressive . . . scheme, in which the operation of various means takes up a great length of time before the ends they tend to can be attained. The change of seasons, the ripening of the fruits of the earth, the very history of a flower, is an instance of this; and so is human life. . . . Our existence is not only successive, but one state of our life and being is appointed by God to be a preparation for another, and that to be the means of attaining to another succeeding one—infancy to childhood, childhood to youth, youth to mature age. Men are impatient, and are for precipitating things; but the Author of nature appears delib-

* *Analogy, part I. chap. i. sec. 1.*

erate throughout His operations ; accomplishing His natural ends by slow, successive steps."* Nor, when we remember the analogy found between all the works of God, is this consideration without importance here.

Thus in all things under the government of God, to grow is to live. Where there is life, there is growth. Where there is not growth, there is not life.†

Such is the broad ground on which we are encouraged to believe that our faith is capable of increase. It must be noticed, however, further, that we have direct evidence in Scripture of the fact that faith does actually follow the universal law. Some of the Scriptural expressions already quoted, as implying growth of spiritual life upon the whole, are found indeed, on a close examination, to have a special reference to the grace of faith. Many not less explicit texts to the same effect might be quoted. Thus, in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, we find Paul telling the members of that Church how night and day he prayed exceedingly that he might see their face, " and perfect that which was lacking in their faith ;" and in the Second Epistle he says, " We thank God always for you, . . . that your

* Analogy, part II. chap. iv.

† " Notre nature est dans le mouvement ; le repos entier est la mort."—Pascal, *Pensées*, tome i. p. 195.

faith groweth exceedingly."* But there is, above all, the experience of the Apostles, whose personal experience of the working of the Divine Spirit occupies so important a place throughout the New Testament, and "whose faith" later Christians are expressly enjoined to "follow, considering the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."†

These men (as has been already noticed) themselves, on one occasion, addressed their Master on this subject, praying Him to increase their faith.‡ Now, we have not equally abundant means of judging in every case; but as to more than one of the Twelve we are enabled to trace their spiritual history from first to last. And not only do we find evidence that, in conformity with their prayer, the Lord *did* increase the faith of the Apostles; but there is, perhaps, nothing in all Scripture more remarkable than the progress, in this respect, made by these men, between the dates of our earlier and later information concerning them. Thus the Simon Peter of the four Gospels is, not only as regards other graces of the Spirit, but especially as regards a true faith, in all its vital principles, hardly to be recognised as the same individual who afterwards appears in the

* 1 Thess. iii. 10; 2 Thess. i. 3. (See Ellicott on both passages.)

† Heb. xiii. 7, 8.

‡ Luke xvii. 5.

Acts of the Apostles, and in the two Epistles which bear his own name. The advancement is so remarkable, indeed, as to seem almost to amount to a loss of identity. In the Gospels we have, in his case, the grain of mustard-seed, the least of all seeds. In the Acts, and above all in the Epistles, there is the full-grown tree, which “becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”*

As far as our knowledge of them goes, like results were common to the Apostles generally. The Church grew mightily in the times which are embraced in the New Testament canon, but not more mightily than its individual members. The weakness for some time of the faith of the Apostles, though partly accounted for by natural causes,† and also by a cause not natural, but supernatural, to which I shall immediately advert, was no doubt a providential arrangement, intended for the confirmation of their testimony

* Mark iv. 31, 32.

† “The relation between the disciples and their divine Master was like that between children and their parents, in this, among other things, that it was a relation rather of sight than of faith, or at least of faith which was wrapt up in sight, and which had not as yet unfolded itself into distinct consciousness. . . . It was expedient for the Apostles that Jesus should depart from them, to the end that what they had hitherto regarded with more or less of a carnal eye, should become a living spiritual presence and power in their souls.”—Hare’s Mission of the Comforter, vol. i. p. 9, 17.

with those who should afterwards, through their word, believe in Christ. But whatever the explanation, the fact at least is certain that the witnesses of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, far from having been credulous persons (though thus sometimes ignorantly misrepresented *), seem to have been, at the first, as slow of heart to believe—nay, as much disposed to misunderstand—the teaching, and dispute the claims of their Master, as the most hostile critics of the Christian evidences in later times. They

* Even M. Renan gives countenance to this view of the Apostles : “Leur vie peu occupée laissait toute liberté à leur imagination. Les idées sur le royaume de Dieu trouvaient, dans ces petits comités de bonnes gens, plus de créance que partout ailleurs. . . . Jesus rencontra là [on the shores of the Sea of Galilee] sa vraie famille. . . . Leur ignorance était extrême ; ils avaient l'esprit faible, ils croyaient aux spectres et aux esprits. Pas un élément de culture hellénique n'avait pénétré dans ce premier cénacle ; l'instruction juive y était aussi fort incomplète ; mais le cœur et la bonne volonté y débordaient. Le beau climat de la Galilée faisait de l'existence de ces honnêtes pêcheurs un perpétuel enchantement. . . . L'œil clair et doux de ces âmes simples contemplait l'univers en sa source idéale ; le monde dévoilait peut-être son secret à la conscience divinement lucide de ces enfants heureux, à qui la pureté de leur cœur mérita un jour de voir Dieu.”—*Vie de Jesus*, p. 148, 164, 165. With the exception of its estimate of the ignorance and want of culture of the first disciples, the whole of the above description is purely imaginary, and is not only without warrant, but in direct opposition to the facts, which surely represent the first disciples, at the commencement of their discipleship—that is, during our Lord's personal ministry—as continually misled by the defect, instead of the excess, of any capacity for contemplating the world “en sa source idéale.”

were not only without strong convictions, they were full of prejudices against the truth ; and, though more than nominally disciples of Jesus, they could hardly be said even to know, except in its simplest elements, what the Gospel meant.* But that which they knew not then, they knew afterwards. The Holy Spirit was given them, as had been promised, to lead them into all truth, and to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto them.† How the faith of these men grew is known to every reader of the New Testament: how it grew in simplicity and clearness, in strength, in comprehensiveness, in spiritual insight. As already said, the very natures of the men seemed to change. Indeed their earlier and

* “Videmus quād difficulter rudimenta ipsa gustent, ut hæsident in minimis quibusque, ut à Magistri ore pendentes, non tamen multum promoveant; quinetiam dum ad monumentum accurrunt mulierum admonitu, resurrectio magistri illis instar somnii est. Quum illis fidei testimonium antè reddiderit Christus, ea prorsus fuisse vacuos dicere fas non est: imò, nisi persuasi fuissent Christum resurrectum esse, concidisset in illis omne studium. Nec verò supersticio traxit mulieres, ut cadaver hominis extincti aromatibus condirent, de cuius vita nulla spes foret; sed quanvis fidem haberent ejus verbis, quem sciebant veracem esse; ruditas tamen, quæ adhuc occupabat eorum mentes, fidem caligine obvolvit, ut essent ferè attoniti. Unde etiam dicuntur tunc demum credidisse, ubi re ipsa ab ipsis comperta fuit sermonum Christi veritas: non quòd credere inceperint, sed quia occultæ fidei semen, quod in eorum cordibus velut emortuum erat, tunc recepto vigore emersit.”— Calvin, *Institutio*, lib. III. cap. ii. sec. 4.

† John xvi. 16.

later history, as believers, appears almost to belong to different ages of the world.

I do not certainly lose sight of an objection which may be taken against an appeal to the case of the Apostles as affording encouragement to ordinary believers. It may be said that if the faith of the Apostles was notoriously greater at one period than another, there was an exceptional reason for the change, inasmuch as the earlier part of their lives, as believers, was separated from the later by a great event in the history of redemption—namely, the mission of the Comforter. And this was doubtless an event of the utmost importance. At first sight (though only at first sight) it might seem even to bear such a character as to deprive the subsequent maturity, as compared with the previous immaturity, of the faith of the Apostles, of all value as evidence of the ordinary operations of divine grace. Shortly before His death Jesus had said to His disciples: “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you: but if I go, I will send Him unto you.”* And in another part of the same Gospel in which these words are recorded we find a similar announcement: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that

* John xvi. 7.

believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”* Accordingly, on the day of Pentecost, which immediately succeeded the ascension of Christ, the Apostles, waiting in Jerusalem for the fulfilment of this promise, “were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.”†

Now, it may be said that any increase in the faith of the Apostles in such circumstances is exceptional, and cannot be adduced as affording encouragement to Christians in ordinary times. The question as to the meaning and purposes of the mission of the Comforter, in some of its aspects, is certainly a difficult one, and one to be approached only in a very humble and reverent spirit. A full discussion of it will be found in the work of Archdeacon Hare.‡ The practical con-

* John vii. 37-39.

† Acts ii. 1-4.

‡ The Mission of the Comforter, see especially Sermon I., and note H. Archdeacon Hare’s own opinion as to John vii. 39 is, that “the gifts which [the Apostles] had hitherto received . . . were in the main external, such as the power of working miracles. The higher gifts of the Holy Ghost—that transforming power of

clusion to which an examination of the whole statements of Scripture on the subject leads, appears, however, to be shortly this—namely, that, as regards at least His sanctifying grace, the Holy Spirit was not given to the Apostles for the first time on the day of Pentecost, but only then in larger measure than previously ; that a gradation in the communication of the same grace (as of other spiritual blessings) is not peculiar to the days of the Apostles ; and that if the intervention of the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit accounts — as, doubtless, it does account — for many differences to be found in the faith of the Apostles before and after that event, this does not diminish the value of their experience as a proof that faith may be increased, but only adds to it, by pointing out to us, in a prominent way, the source whence such increase may always be derived, and from which it ought always to be sought.

There is, then, direct testimony in Scripture to the fact that the grace of faith follows what has been shown to be the invariable law of spiritual

faith which nothing can awaken, except a lively insight into the sacrifice and mediation of the Saviour—and those spiritual graces whereby the life of Christ is fashioned in our souls, had not yet been vouchsafed to them" (Ibid. vol. i. p. 25). Calvin's exposition (which Mr Hare quotes as "excellent") appears preferable to the above : " *Non simpliciter negat Evangelista gratiam Spiritus ante Christi mortem pii fuisse exhibitam, sed nondum ita illustrem et conspicuam tunc fuisse ut postea futura erat.*"—Ibid. vol. ii. p. 451.

(nay, of all kinds of) life, and *is* capable of growth and increase.

Let me only add that it is inconceivable, and indeed *impossible*, that the case should be otherwise: inconceivable and impossible that when all other gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, to say nothing of the whole processes of our own lives otherwise, are by their nature progressive, and are ever moving onward, our faith should stand still. Without, at least, a constant miracle, like that which, at the command of Joshua, enabled the Israelites to be avenged of their enemies at Gil-boah, such an arrest of a part of the wide-extending and closely interdependent system of man's life is not only improbable, and, as we have seen, contrary to Scripture testimony, but inconceivable and impossible. In fact, though perhaps too seldom recognised with sufficient prominence even by the best of our theological writers, the doctrine of faith's increase is expressly disputed only by those persons who fall into the extravagance of holding that *all* the graces of the spiritual life are alike called into existence, at the moment of conversion, in an absolutely perfect state, and are alike insusceptible of subsequent advancement. The Anabaptists of the time of Luther,* some of the Moravian Brethren in the end of last century,† and a number of the earlier Methodists—not ex-

* D'Aubigné, book X. chap. x.

† Lavington, p. 28.

cepting, at one period of his life, Wesley himself* —held, it is true, that faith in a state of perfect development, free from all trace of doubt or weakness—the plerophoria, or full assurance, of faith—was given, once for all, at conversion. But they held, at the same time, that entire freedom from all sin, and complete conformity to the divine will in every respect, were also attained at conversion in the like instantaneous manner. There was consistency in such a view, however great ignorance and delusion. No one, however, as far as I know, who maintains that grace is progressive upon the whole, has ever professed to hold that any exception to this rule is to be found in the case of faith in Christ. I have referred to the Reformers as sometimes using incautious language with regard to the nature of saving faith, and especially as apparently requiring higher degrees of that grace as indispensable, than are so required in Scripture itself. They did not, however, fail to acknowledge that faith admits of progress, but on the contrary are found, when occasion offered, to insist strongly on that truth. Thus Calvin, in his reply to certain objections against the Protestant doctrine of the sacraments, writes as follows : “Our opponents say that our faith, if good, cannot be made better ; for there is no faith except that which leans steadfastly, firmly, and without dis-

* Wesley's Second Journal.

traction, on the mercy of God. It had been better for them to pray with the Apostles that the Lord would increase their faith, than confidently to maintain a perfection of faith which none of the children of men ever attained, or shall attain, in this life. Let them tell us what kind of faith they think his was who said, 'Lord, I believe; help mine unbelief.' For that faith, though incomplete, was a good faith, and yet, by the removal of unbelief, might be expected to be made better. But by no stronger argument can they be refuted than that which their own consciences supply. For if they confess that they are sinners (which, whether they will or not, they cannot deny), to what must they attribute this quality itself but to the imperfection of their faith? . . . Do they not feel that a great part of their hearts is void of faith? *Do they not perceive new additions to their faith day by day?* A certain man boasted that he grew old while still learning. *Thrice miserable are we Christians if we grow old without making progress, when our faith ought to advance by degrees through every period of life, until it grow up unto a perfect man.** In the same way Marshall, who held extreme views as to the identity of faith with assurance: "Beware of thinking so highly of this assurance, as if it were inconsistent with any doubting of the soul. . . . May not one that

* Instit., lib. IV. cap. xiv. sec. 7, 8.

truly believeth say, 'Lord, help my unbelief'? . . . I say that such a one hath some true assurance, though he must strive to grow to a higher degree. . . . *We should* continue and *increase in the most holy faith*. . . . And we must not account that we have already attained, or are already perfect, but we must strive to be more rooted and built up in Him, until we come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

If, however, it should happen that there are any persons who suppose faith to be incapable of increase, and, at the same time, are fully aware of the gradual progress of the spiritual life upon the whole; who know well—for what reasonable man can be ignorant of this?—that the believer grows in knowledge, grows in experience, grows in the conviction of his own sinfulness and weakness, grows in a comprehension of the excellence and glory of Christ, grows, in fact, in grace in all other respects, but who imagine for some reason that faith is an exception to the rule: to such persons it must be said, that to advance in gracious affections generally, and not in faith, is simply *impossible*. Can our knowledge, for instance, increase, and our faith remain stationary? I say this is not only improbable, and unscriptural, and contrary to experience, but, from the nature of the case, *impossible*.

* *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, p. 156, 212.

CHAPTER IV.

OF FAITH'S INCREASE: WHAT IT IS.

“ But thou,” said I, “ hast missed thy mark,
Who sought’st to wreck my mortal ark,
By making all the horizon dark.

No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly longed for death.
’Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want.”

—TENNYSON’S *Two Voices*.

“ La nature agit par progrès: *itus et reditus*. Elle passe et revient: puis va plus loin, puis deux fois moins, puis plus que jamais. . . . La nature de l’homme n’est pas d’aller toujours. Elle a ses allées et venues.”—PASCAL, *Pensées Diverses*.

“ Say not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.”

—CLOUGH’S *Poems*.

CHAPTER IV.

OF FAITH'S INCREASE : WHAT IT IS.

THERE is a growth or increase of unbelief, even as there is a growth or increase of faith. Both are possible : I need hardly say that they are not identical ; nor must they be confounded the one with the other.

There are men in the world who, beginning life as Christians, perhaps as professors of the strictest form of Christianity, abandon, one after another, all their earlier convictions on the subject of religion, until they find themselves without anything worthy of the name of faith in Christ. They have gradually *outgrown* their faith. By a process similar to that which is so painfully illustrated in the 'Phases of Faith' of Professor W. F. Newman, they have been driven out, as they will say, from its strongholds, step by step, and one after another, by their own advancing knowledge and experience. At one period of their lives they had

a firm and unhesitating belief in the truth of Christianity, an implicit submission to the whole of its doctrines, and, above all, a sure trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. They are now too far advanced in knowledge and experience to believe firmly and unhesitatingly in the truth of Christianity, to receive its doctrines without at least many reservations, or to put their trust in Christ as a Saviour. If they now believe at all, indeed, it is by the sacrifice of those articles of belief, and that spirit of dependence on Christ, which give to faith all its value. Nor does the religious advancement (as it is called) of such persons—an advancement, however, not in faith but in unbelief—usually stop short of total infidelity.

That this is an entirely different process from the growth and increase of the faith of the true Christian, need hardly here be said. If anything of this nature, indeed, had been the boon granted to the Apostles, or promised to other believers, in answer to the prayer, "Increase our faith"—and if our only hope in God for the future had therefore been that we might live to be without God and without hope—then infinitely better would it be for all believers to pray that they might remain rather for ever in the weakness and immaturity of that faith which, even in its weakness and immaturity, is to them everything in the world.

But when His children ask for bread, our

heavenly Father does not thus give them a stone. He does not increase their faith by uprooting the tender sapling from the ground, but rather by truly making the least of seeds grow and spread till it becomes the greatest of herbs: the growth or increase of faith being, according to the promises and examples of Holy Scripture, and (I am persuaded) according to the ordinary experiences of believers, a true increase of the true faith of a Christian.

What is the true growth or increase of faith? It is not denied certainly that it is not carried on in the same manner or to the same heights of attainment in the case of every individual believer; that if it implies gain upon the whole, it is not without loss; and that it is liable to intermissions or even temporary retrogression. But it is maintained at the same time that it is a true growth in true faith, notwithstanding: growth in the belief of the divine origin of Christianity, growth in submission to the doctrines of Holy Scripture, and growth in an exclusive and confident trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. In this chapter I shall notice these several topics in their order, in the hope that, in this way, some light may be thrown upon the nature of that increase of his faith which ought to be aimed after, and may be expected, by the Christian.

It is admitted, then, in the first place, that there

is no uniform law as to "the measure of faith" or "the proportion of faith," to use the language of St Paul,* which the believer, in making true progress, ought to reach, and may therefore hope to attain to. I believe, indeed, on the contrary, that the greatest diversities prevail between man and man in this respect.

In all those processes which constitute growth in the natural world, variations occur in the extent and also in the direction of the progress which is made in every individual case. Thus an oak grows, but all oaks do not attain to the same dimensions, nor assume the same forms. A child grows to be a man, but there is no uniform type of manhood ; no Procrustean law as to the height, or strength, or beauty, the mental power upon the whole, or the special capacities, of the full-grown man.

The differences in these respects which are found in the individual specimens even of the same kinds of plants or animals, are determined by conditions into which it would be out of place here to attempt to enter in detail. It may be enough for us to remember that there are various purposes which the Creator has in view as in the existence so in the development of the several forms of life which He calls into being, and of that life as it is found in the individual no less than in

* Rom. xii. 3, 6.

the species ; and that all God's works, if they do not attain to the same kind of perfection, are each of them perfect after their own nature, and in view of the purposes assigned to them in the "manifold wisdom of God."*

And so also it is in regard to "the measure of faith" and "the proportion of faith" attainable by the individual believer ; or, in other words, in regard to the extent and direction in which his faith increases. He may expect certainly that that faith will be so perfected as to be adapted to the circumstances in which he is placed and the work he has to do in the world. For the promise is, that "as his days so shall his strength be," and that such grace will be given as is "sufficient *for him*."† But otherwise there is no standard of the measure or proportion of faith which, however legitimate his progress, he may expect to reach.‡

Thus, to revert to a distinction before referred to between intense and comprehensive faith, can it be maintained that both these attainments are in

* Eph. iii. 10.

† Deut. xxxiii. 25 ; 2 Cor. xii. 9.

‡ Rom. xii. 3, 6. That the *μέτρον πίστεως* and the *ἀναλογία τῆς πίστεως* of this passage refer to the amount of faith's receptivity of spiritual gifts (see Alford, *in loc.*), may be admitted without affecting the truth of the statement made in the text ; for the diversity of these gifts, as of faith itself, also a gift of God, is said to depend on the fact that different men have different work to do in the world—all members of the body of Christ not having the same office. See verse 4, and 1 Cor. xii. 6, 7.

every case equally within reach of the same man or equally necessary to him? There are, doubtless, occasionally circumstances in the Church or in the individual which more especially call for the development of the one rather than of the other. An intense and vigorous faith, even though it be not only imperfectly informed, but also narrow and bigoted—and perhaps the greatest vigour of faith is, in the present state of our being, inseparable from some narrowness and bigotry—may be the most suitable for some times and some men. Or what may appear to be a less robust and decided faith may be the most suitable, so that it be learned, rich in Scriptural knowledge, full of wisdom and spiritual understanding. Both ought, as far as possible, to be aimed after, but both may not be equally necessary in every case, nor in every case attained in equal measure. The development of faith, in short, may be in some respects a different thing in different men. The same law holds in regard to all spiritual attainments. There are many members in the body of Christ, and every member has not the same office. Accordingly there are also “diversities of gifts.”

We are not then to suppose that every degree of increase of faith, or increase of faith in every direction, will take place in the experience of every individual believer, whatever his earnestness

and diligence in the pursuit of the highest attainments every way, and however truly, therefore, he may be making progress. Bishop Butler has suggested a remarkable illustration of the principle now referred to. By increase of faith not a few persons, when they ask for this blessing, mean a deliverance from all doubt and uncertainty of mind in regard to the evidences of religion. Is such a consummation in the case of every individual truly desirable, and therefore to be hoped for? Let me refer the reader to the whole of Butler's sixth chapter in the second part of the 'Analogy,' for an answer to this question. I will quote one or two sentences to indicate the tenor of his argument: "Temptations render our state a more improving state of discipline than it would be otherwise. . . . Now, speculative difficulties are, in this respect, of the very same nature with external temptations. . . . Nor does there appear any absurdity in supposing that the speculative difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved, may make even the principal part of some person's trial. For as the temptations of the generality of the world are the ordinary motives to injustice or unrestrained pleasure, or to live in the neglect of religion from that frame of mind which renders many persons almost without feeling as to anything distant, or which is not the object of their senses; so there are other persons

without this shallowness of temper, persons of a deeper sense as to what is invisible and future, . . . and who from their natural constitution of body and of temper, and from their external condition, may have comparatively small temptation to behave ill, small difficulty in behaving well, in the common course of life. Now when these latter persons have a distinct full conviction of the truth of religion without any possible doubts or difficulties, . . . religion is scarce any more a discipline to them than it is to creatures in a state of perfection. Yet these persons may possibly stand in need of moral discipline and exercise in a higher degree than they would have by such an easy practice of religion." *

It is therefore conceivable, and no doubt it is true, that some believers, however much they increase in faith upon the whole, may never attain to that freedom from particular defects which is reached by others, and which they may themselves most earnestly desire. The growth of their faith takes other directions.

With regard to degrees of attainment, there are the same differences between man and man: as I shall have occasion to notice afterwards.

Again, it must be admitted, in the second place, that there is always loss as well as gain—decrease as well as increase—in the progress of our faith:

* Analogy, part II. chap. vi.

a truth which it is well we should clearly understand and carefully keep in mind.

Growth or increase is, in every case, more or less a complex process. To grow is not merely to become larger, or stronger, or older. The process is not so simple as this: it is not merely a matter of less and more. Thus *change*, in one shape or other, enters into the true conception of all growth.* The oak is said to be in the acorn; but an oak is not merely a larger or stronger acorn, but something, in many ways, very different from an acorn. The child is said, too, to be the father of the man. The man is in the child, as the oak is in the acorn. But a man is not merely a child of larger growth or of greater strength. He differs from a child otherwise than in size and strength. He has passed into a higher, but also, in some respects, a different, state of existence.†

* “All things steadfastnesse do hate
And changèd be: yet being rightly wayd
They are not changèd from their first estate:
But by their change their being do dilate.”

—Spenser’s *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*, i. 58.

† I agree with Dr Newman, certainly, in holding the first test of a faithful or legitimate development to be “its preservation of the essential idea of the doctrine or polity which it represents.” But Dr Newman justly notices that, apart from the essential idea, change is not inconsistent with true growth: “The adult animal has the same make as it had at its birth: young birds do not grow into fishes; nor does the child degenerate into the brute, of which he is, by inheritance, lord. ‘Imitatetur,’ says Vincentius, ‘animarum religio rationem corporum, quæ licet annorum processu

And as change characterises all growth, so in all growth there is at once gain and loss; decrease in some things, with increase upon the whole. Nor are we to expect to find that the growth of faith presents any exception to this universal law.

Take the case of a recent disciple, who, previously, let us suppose, careless and uninformed, has, under deep convictions of sin, and a just sense of the awful terrors of judgment, had his heart opened to receive, and receive, doubtless, with wonder and amazement, the testimony of God regarding the salvation which is in Christ; and who, as he hopes, is now believing in the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation. His acquaintance with Scripture is probably (in some respects, indeed, it is necessarily) very imperfect: * but he

numeros suos evolvant et explicit, eadem tamen quæ erant remanent.' Unity in type is certainly the most obvious characteristic of a faithful development. Yet this illustration must not be pressed to the extent of denying all variation, nay, considerable alteration, of proportion of relation in the development of the parts or aspects of an idea. Such changes in outward appearance and internal harmony occur in the instance of the animal creation itself."—Essay on Development of Christian Doctrine, p. 58, 66.

* "It was towards the close of January or the beginning of February 1698 that . . . God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined into my mind, to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. This light clearly revealed the mystery of free justification through Christ. . . . But yet after this glorious light had remained some considerable time with me, I was sadly ignorant of many of the

makes up in zeal and fervour for his deficiencies in knowledge and experience. If we suppose him to be full of self-confidence—confidence in his own knowledge and strength—we shall not attribute to him a state of mind altogether unprecedented in the case of Christian believers in the beginning of their course.* It is inevitable, too, that he should be acting and thinking, looking at religion and at the world and at himself, under the influence of some measure of temporary excitement. Above all, he is probably young in years as well as in the faith—subject to all the happy illusions,† and characterised by the san-

most important things relating even to the mystery of forgiveness. . . . Well might Christ say to me, many a day after this, as to Philip, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?'”—*Memoirs of Thomas Halyburton*, p. 44, 50.

* “I resolved to impose such restraints upon myself, and confine myself to such a course of walking, as neither our circumstances nor our duty in this world allow. . . . I began to count upon enlargement and success in duty as what was not only my due, but what I should always have. . . . Like the disciples, I said, ‘Lord, even the devils are subject to us.’ I looked upon this stock of grace I had obtained as what would be sufficient to carry me through all my difficulties, and saw not that the grace which was sufficient for me was still in the Lord’s hand. But now the Lord quickly undeceived me.”—*Memoirs of Thomas Halyburton*, p. 50.

† Luke xxii. 33, 34. “It seems to me,” writes Dr Edward Payson (and the observation is valuable on many accounts), “that those who die young, like Brainerd and Martyn, know almost nothing of the difficulty of persevering in the Christian race. My difficulties increase every year.”—*Payson’s Memoirs*, p. 432.

guine spirit, the enthusiasm, and energy of youth, which colour his religion * no less than his whole life. Is it necessary to say a single word to prove that in the progress of time, and of experience, and of a knowledge of Scripture, and of himself, such a man's faith, while it gains upon the whole, must also lose some of the qualities by which, in the earlier stages of its existence, it used to be characterised ?

Thus, for example, in regard to the articles of his faith, he outgrows many convictions which he at first arrived at in ignorance, or in misconception of the doctrine of Christ. It is inevitable † that every believer should begin his Christian course not only in much ignorance but in some error. However well informed, and however sincere in his faith, he at first believes, if much which is true, much also which is false. In the course of his Christian life, indeed, every believer finds almost as much to be *unlearned* as to be learned by him in regard to the true nature of the Gospel.

Nor is anything more important than that his faith should thus be purified from unworthy admixtures. If the truth sanctifies, error corrupts, the heart. "Take heed," said our Lord, "that the light which is in thee be not darkness." ‡ And

* Jer. ii. 2.

† See Gerard's *Dissertations*, Diss. II.

‡ Luke xi. 35.

again, "If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"* We have nothing to regret in the sacrifice of our most cherished religious convictions if they were false: the less to regret because they were cherished, and because they were so cherished under the sanction of religion. Why is it our duty to disturb the heathen in beliefs which, though heterodox, are yet honest, and are not without their hopes and consolations? Because faith in demons,† and in the doctrines of demons,‡ is not only false but pernicious,§ and the more pernicious the more sincerely and zealously it is held. So it is with all error—ours no less than theirs—which, as far as it goes, corrupts, instead of, like the truth, sanctifying the soul.|| But it is not only erroneous doctrine that he leaves behind him.

Cowper, in one of his hymns, comparing his later with his earlier Christian experience, asks despairingly—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?"

And he appears to imply, in what follows, that the consciousness of some decay of the intensity

* Mat. vi. 23.

† 1 Cor. x. 20.

‡ 1 Tim. iv. 1.

§ Rom. i. 25, 26.

|| See Epistles to Timothy and Titus, *passim*.

of his "joy in believing" was a proof of spiritual declension upon the whole.* Other believers, in like manner, look back with regret to the time "when first they saw the Lord," because they were then less troubled with doubts and difficulties in regard to the evidences of religion than they have become since.† Such partial losses, as regards some of the qualities of our first faith, are inevitable, and are not by any means inconsistent with gain upon the whole—that is, with a real progress from immaturity to maturity, from a less perfect to a more perfect state; and it is of very great importance that, to prevent disappointment and needless discouragement, this should be distinctly understood.

That there is decrease as well as increase is characteristic indeed of all growth. If we take the case of natural life, for instance, we find certainly growth, but yet, in many respects, we find a loss of qualities (or perhaps it might be more

* "Return, O holy dove! return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast."—Olney Hymns.

† "At first he doubted not of the truth of the Scriptures or of the life to come, because he saw not the difficulties that might cause doubting: after that he saw them and doubted. . . . Afterwards, having seen both difficulties and evidences, his faith was much the stronger; and yet till the last he found cause to make it his daily prayer that God would increase his faith."—Baxter's Life, vol. i. p. 394.

strictly called a change of properties) between the period of immaturity and that of maturity. Thus, as we advance in years, from boyhood to manhood and old age, we lose the enthusiasm, the warmth of affection, the sensibility, the sympathy, the ardour of early youth—attributes which, however engaging and delightful, are, from the nature of things, transitory and evanescent, not capable of being sustained, much less increased. We lose these even as we lose youth's smooth cheek, its bounding pulse, its elastic tread—

“ The thoughtless day, the easy night,
The spirits pure, the slumbers light,
That fly the approach of morn.”

Yet we grow notwithstanding. Our advance—up to a certain period of life at least*—is a real advance upon the whole; an advance from less to more, from immaturity to maturity, from a lower to a higher state. Unavoidable decrease of the grace and vigour of youth is more than compensated by the increase of wisdom and experience. If our affections are less warm, they are not so apt

* Montaigne fixes this period so early as the age of thirty, adding: “ Quant à moy, je tiens pour certain que depuis cet age, et mon esprit et mon corps ont plus diminué qu'augmenté, et plus reculé qu'avancé. Il est possible qu'à ceux qui employent bien le temps, la science et l'experience croissent avec la vie: mais la vivacité, la promptitude, la fermeté, et autres parties bien plus nostres, plus importantes et essentielles, se fanissent et s'allanguissent.”—*Essais*, tome i. p. 362.

to be misplaced on trifling or unworthy objects, being more under the control of prudence and a knowledge of the world. If in the business of active life we cannot do the same things as the young, we are able to take our part in much more important transactions.* If our senses are less acute, and our feelings less keen, our judgment is more ripe.† Age, in fine, is an advance upon youth, not in every particular quality—*i.e.*, not in those qualities which peculiarly belong to the period of youth—but in more important qualities, and upon the whole.‡

* “A rebus gerendis senectus abstrahit? Quibus? an iis, quæ in juventute geruntur et viribus? Nullæne igitur res sunt seniles, quæ vel infirmis corporibus, animo tamen administrentur? . . . Nihil igitur afferunt, qui in re gerenda versari senectutem negant, similesque sunt, ut, si qui gubernatorem in navigando agere nihil dicant, cum alii malos scandant, alii per foros cурsent, alii sentinam exhaustant: ille autem clavum tenens sedeat in puppi quietus. Non faciat ea, quæ juvenes; at vero multo majora et meliora facit.”—Cicero, *De Senectute*, cap. vi.

† Baxter's *Life*, vol. i. p. 394. The whole passage here referred to is very curious and interesting. It is entitled, “On the difference he observed in himself between youth and age.”

‡ No doubt can be entertained as to the general truth of this statement. Of course, much may be said on the other side, especially in regard to moral decadence in the case of men without religion. In such cases there is not wanting foundation even for such a gloomy representation as the following: “Age doth not rectify but incurvate our natures, turning bad dispositions into worse habits. . . . I find my growing judgment daily instruct me how to be better, but my untamed affections and confirmed vitiosity make me daily do worse. I find in my confirmed age the same sins I discovered in my youth,” &c.—*Religio Medici*, sec. xlvi. Like

We see the same truth remarkably illustrated in the history of the Church of Christ. I cannot here enter on the question as to the true nature of the development of Christian doctrine in the Church from the days of our Lord.* No doubt

Montaigne, Sir Thomas Browne fixes upon the age of thirty years as that of greatest maturity.—*Ibid.* sec. xlivi.

* This subject is referred to afterwards in another connection. The general theory of the development of Christian doctrine adopted by Dr Newman, is thus described by himself, namely—"That the increase and expansion of the Christian creed and ritual, and the variations which have attended the process in the case of individual writers and Churches, are the necessary attendants on any philosophy or polity which takes possession of the intellect and heart, and has had any wide or extended dominion; that from the nature of the human mind, time is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas; and that the highest and most wonderful truths, though communicated to the world once for all by inspired teachers, could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients, but as received and transmitted by minds not inspired, and through media which were human, have required only the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation."—*Essay on Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 27. The use to which Dr Newman applies this theory is, as is well known, to make not the Scriptures, but "the history of eighteen centuries," "our most natural informant concerning the doctrine and worship of Christianity," or the rule of faith. The question is, whether the development which takes place legitimately, and must be distinguished from the corruption of Christianity, consists simply in the fuller comprehension of Scripture, or also in its expansion and the supply of its deficiencies? which last is the opinion of Dr Newman. For another view of the same subject—in which the position that "in theology, as in every other department of human knowledge, there is a law of progress," is maintained in consistency with the sole and abiding authority of Scripture as the rule of faith—see Hare's *Mission of the Comforter*, vol. ii. p. 410-432.

can exist that there is a sense in which the Church, as a Church, *grows*, and grows not only in the number of its members, but in the knowledge of doctrine, in faith, and in spiritual life generally. It would be no living organisation if it did not grow. The Church of the present is, upon the whole, an advance upon the Church of the past; and the Church of the future will be an advance on the Church of the present. Yet the Church's gain by such progress is not without loss. To the halcyon days of the Church's prime, indeed, even those whose sympathies might least be expected to tend in that direction are found to look back, not without regret, as to "former times" in some respects "better" than the present. "There have been great saints since the days of the Apostles," writes one of the authors of the 'Essays and Reviews'; "but the saintliness of that time had a peculiar beauty which we cannot copy—a beauty not confined to the Apostles or great leaders, but pervading the whole Church. It is not what they endured, nor the virtues which they practised, which so dazzle us. It is the perfect simplicity of the religious life, the singleness of heart, the openness, the childlike earnestness. All else has been repeated since, but this never. . . . If we compare degrees of devotion, it may be reckoned something intrinsically nobler to serve God and love Him now when religion is colder

than it was, and when we have not the aid of those thrilling, heart-stirring sympathies which blessed the early Church. But even if our devotion be sometimes nobler in itself, yet theirs still remains the more beautiful, the more attractive."*

Now, as it is with the natural life, so is it with the spiritual life; and as it is with the faith of the Church, so is it with the faith of the individual believer. Our faith cannot grow older without losing the charm of youth; nor wiser without sacrificing prejudices and illusions; nor stronger without throwing aside the staff, perhaps a broken reed, by which it was fain to support its tottering steps in the time of its weakness.

It may, once more, be admitted, that in the progress or growth of his faith there are periods of apparent intermission or even retrogression to be expected by every man. How far these are always truly interruptions of the process, and not rather essential elements in it, may be questioned. They are certainly sometimes the direct result of suspended vigilance and diligence, or of lapses into sinful and worldly habits. It becomes therefore every man who experiences them to consider very carefully whether he is not himself responsible for them. But even in the case of those who give their whole hearts to the work, who have no more constant desire or aim than the advancement of

* Essays and Reviews (the Education of the World), p. 30.

their faith, it is certain that intermissions and even retrogressions do occur.

It is admitted, then, upon the whole, that the increase of faith is carried on under certain conditions : conditions which are not inconsistent with true and substantial progress, and which, indeed, are found to attach to growth and progress of every kind in this world. It is of great importance that this point should be clearly understood and constantly borne in mind. Unwarranted expectations might otherwise be indulged, and be followed by needless and hurtful disappointment and discouragement. It is still more important, however, to notice that, subject to such conditions as have now been referred to, the increase of faith is a true increase in all the essential elements of a true faith in Christ ; that it is truly a progressive and not a retrograde movement ; an advance of faith in Christ, not an advance (if so grievous a declension may thus be called) from faith in Christ to some other faith ; and, more particularly, that it consists not in the loosening, but in the confirmation, of our assent to the divine origin of Christianity ; not in the contraction, but in the enlargement, of our belief of the doctrines of revelation ; and, above all, not in the abandonment of our trust in Christ, but in the attainment by us of a more and more exclusive and more and more confident trust in and reliance upon Him for salvation.

With regard to our belief, for instance, in the divine authority of the Christian revelation (the indispensable basis of all true trust in Christ), it need hardly be said that as far as we are to be guided by the authority of Holy Scripture itself, there can, in the case of the true Christian who diligently uses the right means, be no deterioration, but only improvement. Some earnest believers often express their terror lest it might be possible that they should be so far left to themselves as to be permitted to fall away into total infidelity. They are even afraid to study the subject from a distrust of their own hearts, and a secret distrust also of the truth. Their great fear is that whatever they do, it may be found impossible for them to escape the snares of the tempter, and end their lives as those who have denied the faith. Such apprehensions are, I repeat, groundless. Some men do thus fall away, but not those who ever truly believed, and who continue honestly to seek help from God. God "will not suffer them to be tempted more than they are able, but with every temptation will give them a way of escape that they may be able to bear it."* Nay, they are taught to expect that in this respect, because in every respect, they shall go on from strength to strength.†

They may expect certainly to change their opinion as to the cogency of some of the argu-

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† Ps. lxxxiv. 7; 2 Cor. iii. 18.

ments and the sufficiency of some of the evidences on which they at first placed their reliance, and to become better acquainted with the number and importance of the difficulties by which the whole subject is confessedly encompassed. Such a result is not by any means improbable. In the earlier stages of their Christian life many sincere believers are very little acquainted with the Christian evidences. They have never had their attention seriously directed to these evidences. They believe the Christian religion to be from God, perhaps, simply because they have been brought up in this faith ; and if they have been led to inquire for themselves, they possibly may have done this under the influence of feelings which so strongly prepossessed them in favour of belief as to render them much more easily satisfied than they can expect to continue always. Accordingly, the faith of not a few sincere Christians in the divine origin and authority of the religion of Christ, considered as a question of evidence and reasoning, is, for some considerable period, to be compared only to the faith of a child in the truth it hears from the lips of its mother : it is as simple and undoubting, but also often not less unintelligent. Now this cannot last. A man of an inquiring mind and average cultivation, in the midst of growing experience and increasing knowledge, cannot hope to retain (even if it were desirable that he should retain) a faith of

this description. He puts away this child's faith, as he puts away the faith of his natural childhood, with other childish things. The grounds on which he at first accepted the authority of Scripture and the truth of Christianity seem no longer sufficient: some of them no longer tenable. He finds the great problem which agitates so many minds at every moment more difficult than it once appeared. He can now understand what perhaps once seemed to him inexplicable, that even honest and truth-seeking inquirers may be exposed to sceptical doubts, or even become victims to infidelity. At heart, in short, he may still be a child, but in understanding he is a man.

With all this, however, he attains to a more and more firm and stable persuasion that Christianity is from God, a growing confidence in the inspiration of Holy Scripture, and an increased confidence in its authority every way as a revelation of the will of God to his salvation.

For it must be remembered that an increase in the strength of our faith in this respect, or in others, is not by any means incompatible with the dissipation of illusions and prejudices. We believe, indeed, better and not worse—with what is, in truth, a stronger and not a weaker faith—the ~~more~~ perfectly we are able to separate the reasonable evidences of religion from those which are unworthy of dependence. There may be at once

less credulousness and firmer conviction; a faith at once less implicit, perhaps less undisturbed, and yet more deeply rooted and more immovable. In a word, there is the blind confidence of ignorance or want of thought, and the enlightened confidence of reason and knowledge and experience; and the former may pass away at the same time that the other waxes stronger and stronger.

Nor, again, do believers, as they advance in their course, adopt a narrower, but only a wider and more comprehensive, belief of the doctrines of the Gospel. To narrow the articles of their creed, so far as these are founded in Scripture, is of course impossible, without abandoning everything in the shape of faith in Christ. They may certainly, as we have seen, give up human opinions in which they once believed as Scriptural doctrines; such opinions being, in the end, found to have no warrant in the Word of God. But they cannot, at least consistently with the maintenance of Christian faith, do that which some men attempt to do—namely, hold to their belief in the Gospel in general at the same time that they disbelieve it in detail, or preserve, much less strengthen, their faith in some portions of it by the sacrifice of the rest; a compromise often attempted, but obviously inadmissible, and always ending in disappointment.

While, however, the believer in his progressive

course does not narrow, he cannot fail infinitely to extend his range of doctrinal belief. In the first place, if he avails himself of due means, he may certainly hope to increase his knowledge of the truth, to grow in wisdom and spiritual understanding, in the breadth of his views, in spiritual insight; to enter, in short, more deeply into the meaning even of elementary truth, and to take a wider range of Christian doctrine. And, in the second place, with such enlarged knowledge he may hope to receive a more comprehensive faith. In the case of all who, by putting their trust in Christ, believe to the salvation of the soul, there necessarily remains, after this decisive step has been taken, great room for an increase in the knowledge and reception of divine truth. That a true trust in Christ may coexist with extreme ignorance, and even some unbelief of particular doctrines, we have already seen.* But these are

* See *ante*, p. 18. The “weak in faith” of Rom. xiv. 1, whom Paul declared that God had received, may also be mentioned as an illustration of this. Whether these *ἀσθενοῦντες τὴν πίστιν* were ascetics, or Judaisers, or, as Alford suggests, a combination of both characters, is not a question of much importance. Whatever their prevailing errors, it is evident, from the manner in which the Apostle speaks of them, that these errors were the result neither—as with the innovators in the Galatian Churches—of an unchristian spirit, nor—as at first with the Twelve—of incredulity and distrust, but of imperfect enlightenment. According to Bishop Sanderson (*The First Sermon, ad clerum*, p. 4, 5), they were weak brethren of “shallow understanding and judgment concerning some divine truths appertaining to the doctrine of faith or life.” The details

exceptional cases. Even, however, under the most favourable circumstances, it is impossible that the whole truths of religion, in all their fulness of meaning, can be rightly apprehended and embraced at the commencement of the Christian life, or otherwise than as the result of a slow and gradual process of growth. Our duty is to believe not only in Christ as a Saviour, but in the entire system of Christian doctrine, of which the faithful saying that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners is the elementary principle; and this it is not only our duty to do, but our interest. For we are not otherwise thoroughly furnished with those motives to holy obedience, or those consolations and hopes which, as Christians, we both ought and need to have.* But even to be fully *instructed* in so large a body of truths, and truths of such a nature as those contained in the Christian revelation, is a work of time. There is nothing, accordingly, which we find the Apostle Paul more anxious to secure for his converts than more knowledge, and a deeper spiritual understanding of the truth.† And there is nothing

given in the rest of the chapter referred to, as to the *ἀσθενοῦντες*, all point to that union in their cases of right principle with imperfect knowledge, which, under various forms, is so often met with in the world.

* 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

† See, *e.g.*, Eph. i. 15-20, and iii. 14-19—passages the more remarkable when compared with the indications given in the Acts

more remarkable in his own spiritual history, and that of the other Apostles, than their growth in the same direction. Their faith grew stronger, more steadfast, more confident, but above all it grew *richer*—more truly a reflection of Him who is the great object of faith, and in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It embraced more and more of the Gospel ; it more profoundly understood the full depth and meaning of the doctrine it before believed in superficially ; and it learned to include among the truths which it delighted to contemplate, and whence it derived strength, comfort, and hope, many things it had not at first understood, or which at first it

(xix. 1-3) of the state of ignorance of those believers who formed the nucleus of the Ephesian Church when Paul first visited it. It is to the same increase in the intelligence and comprehensiveness of faith that Paul evidently refers when, writing to the Thessalonians, he tells them of his earnest prayer that he might see them again, “and perfect that which is lacking in your faith” (1 Thess. iii. 10). He could not mean that their faith lacked in vigour or confidence, for he had before expressed in the strongest terms his thankfulness *ὅτι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν . . . πληροφορίᾳ πολλῆ* (1 Thess. i. 5). The whole context points to incompleteness of knowledge of the truth rather than to want of confidence. Dean Alford's exposition is, “He earnestly desired to come to them . . . because he wanted to fill up *τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως αὐτῶν* (iii. 10). Their attention had been so much drawn to one subject—his preaching had been so full of one great matter, and, from the necessity of the case, so scanty on many others which he desired to lay forth to them—that he already feared lest their Christian faith should be a distorted and unhealthy faith.”—Greek Testament, vol. iii., Prolegomena, chap. v. sec. 2. See also Olshausen and Ellicott.

had not been able to bear.* So it is with the believer in every age of the world. It is impossible, indeed, the case should be otherwise; impossible that any Christian man should live a Christian life, reading and meditating on the Word of God, waiting on public ordinances, doing God's holy will, and submitting to the salutary discipline of trial and suffering, without, every day he lives, both understanding and receiving more of the Gospel than he did before.

Above all, however, the true Christian does not abandon his trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, but only trusts in Him the more exclusively and the more confidently.

No doubt there are men who thus fall away even from that reliance on the Saviour, which constitutes, I believe, the very essence of the Christian faith. Some of them profess that the Scripture grounds on which they were first led to believe in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, no longer appear to them to be sufficient to support it; they profess to have discovered that doctrine depends on a misinterpretation of Scripture, and that there is nothing in Scripture, rightly understood, to warrant them in trusting exclusively to the merits of the Redeemer. Others, without perhaps formally abandoning their theoretical belief in this doctrine of Scripture, yet prac-

* Luke xviii. 34; John xii. 16; John xvi. 1.

tically cease to place their reliance exclusively on Christ. They no longer live under the influence of those profound convictions of their own sinfulness and helplessness, and that lively apprehension of the fulness of Christ, which at the first led them to depend wholly upon the Saviour as of God made unto them wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. "Having begun in the Spirit," their faith, like that of the Galatians, is "perfected in the flesh."* Nor is it unaccountable that such departures, whether in doctrine or in practice, from the elementary principles of a true faith in Christ, should occur in the case of some men. All who pursue the study of Scripture find that their original conceptions of divine truth were to some extent partial and one-sided; especially they find that even the true doctrine which they may at the first have held as to the completeness of the merits of Christ for their acceptance with God, is not the whole Gospel of their salvation; and it would be easy to show that there is always some danger lest the new views of truth which they thus acquire may be permitted to supersede, instead of merely enlarging, their original faith. In like manner, the very progress of some men in an outward conformity to religion has a tendency to foster a spirit of self-righteousness, and thus practically to with-

* Gal. ii. 2.

draw them from an exclusive trust in Jesus Christ.

This, however, is not the increase of faith which may be expected by the true Christian, or which takes place in his experience.

In the first place, there is no abandonment, in any degree, of his trust in Christ alone for salvation. His first step was, amidst much ignorance and confusion of thought, and even error on many points of Christian doctrine, to come with deep humility and childlike confidence to Jesus Christ as a man who had destroyed himself, and whose help was alone to be found in his Saviour. Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Christ, he then believed in Christ, that he might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law.* And he never ceases to hold this the beginning of his confidence steadfast unto the end.† He learns many things in regard to the doctrine of Scripture which were formerly unknown to him; but he never learns that he was mistaken in believing that “by grace are we saved through faith; . . . not of works, lest any man should boast;”‡ and that Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.§ Whatever advances, too, he makes in

* Gal. ii. 16.

† Heb. iii. 14.

‡ Eph. ii. 8.

§ Heb. vii. 25.

holy living, he never makes such progress in that attainment, as to need less than at first to trust solely in the righteousness of Christ, or to be able more than at first to depend upon his own righteousness for acceptance with God. He feels, indeed, the need of the mercy of God for his good works as for his bad works—for the works wrought after as before his conversion. “The best things we do,” says Hooker, “have somewhat in them to be pardoned.”* The holiest man who ever lived on earth accordingly finds at the last, as at the first, that his only ground of confidence for God’s favour and for an entrance into God’s presence is the faithful saying, which ever continues to him to be worthy of all acceptation—namely, that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners.”†

But more than this, so far from trusting less in Him in whom they have found mercy, believers, as they advance in their course, only trust in Him

* Learned Discourse of Justification, sec. 7 (Works, vol. ii. p. 609). “Let the holiest,” he says, “and best things we do be considered. We are never better affected unto God than when we pray; yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! How little reverence do we show to the grand majesty of that God unto whom we speak! How little remorse of our own miseries! How little taste of the sweet influence of His tender mercy do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if God, in saying ‘Call upon me,’ had set a very burdensome task?”—Ibid. p. 608.

† 1 Tim. i. 15.

more entirely, more unreservedly, and with the greater confidence. It is not always at first possible for even the true Christian to receive the doctrine as to his being "complete in Christ" in its simplicity and fulness of meaning, or to purge his own soul from every taint of a self-righteous spirit. We see these facts abundantly illustrated in the history of the Apostles.* His views of the doctrine of Christ are not only enlarged, but purified and simplified. His holiness grows, but not more than his humility; his conviction of his own guiltiness and helplessness grows with his attainments in holy living—grows with their growth and strengthens with their strength; and so does his persuasion of the all-sufficiency of Christ. In other words, the longer the Christian lives, and the more he advances in every way to the greatest perfection of which he is in this life capable, he becomes the more a Christian, "growing up unto Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ," till the time when he shall "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."†

One word more. There may certainly occur in some things, or upon the whole, temporary aberrations from the direct path, and even temporary retrogressions. For a time, the Church at Ephesus

* Acts x. 11.

† Eph. iv. 13, 15.

forgot its first love,* and the Galatians were removed from Him that called them into another gospel.† That in such a case, however, the tendency, no less than the duty, of the believer, is to return in the end, with a sure instinct, to the Saviour, is certain.‡ In the natural life, old age is said to be a second childhood ; and it is so, not only in reference to the weakness and helplessness which are incident to both periods, but also in a higher sense. In age, men resume many of the tastes and predilections, with much of the simplicity of character, the repose, the unworldliness, the humility, and the teachableness of children, only bringing to these old virtues a new value from their experience of life. Their longings to revisit in age the home of their boyhood, their delight in recalling the memory of their earliest days, and their attachment to old friends, are illustrations of the same tendency. As it is with the man so is it with the Christian : with this memorable distinction, that while the faith of his youth is (after whatever backslidings) the faith of his age, only deeper, richer, and more steadfast, he never discovers, as others do, to their bitter disappointment, that the objects of that faith have themselves changed. His heavenly Father is the same now as then.§ His Saviour, the Lord Jesus

* Rev. iii. 1.

‡ Hos. xiv. 4.

† Gal. i. 6.

§ Ps. cii. 27.

Christ, is the same now as then.* The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is the same now as then.† And he still finds in the Word of the Lord, which endureth for ever,‡ the same blessed promises in which, in “the kindness of his youth,” § he first

“Read, with sparkling eyes,
His title to a treasure in the skies.”

* Heb. xiii. 8.

† John xiv. 16.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 25.

§ Jer. ii. 2.

CHAPTER V.

OF FAITH AS THE GIFT OF GOD.

“Hæc autem fides, merum est Dei donum, quod solus Deus ex gratia sua, electis suis, secundum mensuram, et quando, cui, et quantum ipse vult donat, et quidem per Spiritum Sanctum. . . . Hæc etiam sua habet incrementa: quæ nisi et ipsa darentur à Deo, non dixissent Apostoli, Domine, adauge nobis fidem.”—HELVETICA CONFESSIO (1566), *De Fide*.

CHAPTER V.

OF FAITH AS THE GIFT OF GOD.

THE doctrine that faith is the effect of an operation of the Holy Spirit must here be noticed, both on account of its obvious bearings on the statement that faith is in its nature progressive, and because it may guide and encourage the believer in the use of the means through which increase of faith must be sought, and by God's blessing will be found.

With regard to the doctrine itself no doubt exists. Unguarded language may sometimes be used which might lead one to conclude that, in the opinion of some classes of professed Christians, faith is absolutely in the power of every man, independently of divine grace. But among those who accept the authority of Scripture there can be, and is, but one belief on this doctrine. Thus it finds support in writers of the school of the

author of the 'Harmonia Apostolica.'* Even Sandeman and his followers, with others who, although differing from them on other points, agree with them in maintaining faith to be "a bare belief of the bare truth," or a simple assent of the understanding to the facts and doctrines of Christianity, hold the work of the Spirit to be essential to its production and development.†

* Harm. Apost., Diss. Prior, cap. ii. sec. 10; Diss. Post, cap. xi. 9; but especially, see *Apologia pro Harmonia*, sec. iii. § 4, where the sense in which faith is held by the author to be the gift of God is thus explained: "Justificationem hominis necessario præcedunt actus quidam seu dispositiones (ut loquuntur), quibus homo ad tantum beneficium a Deo recipiendum aptus atque idoneus reddatur; cujusmodi sunt, dolere de peccato, detestari peccatum, humiliiter se Deo subjecere, ad Dei misericordiam confugere, in Christo Mediatore spem figere, divinum favorem ante omnia ambare, novæ vitæ firmum propositum inire, aliaque consimilia, quæ omnia sacra Scriptura sub *fidei* et *penitentiae* vocabulis complectit. Hi autem actus, sive dispositiones, neutiquam ex meritis humani arbitrii viribus proficiscuntur; sed per Spiritum Sanctum, hominem prævenientem, excitantem, adsistentem, comitantem, (nondum vero in ipso homine habitantem), omnino efficiuntur. Efficiuntur vero in homine atque ab ipso per Dei gratiam, non in instanti, quod fieri nequit, . . . neque necessario sive *irresistibiliter*, ut loquuntur; sed gradatim, et prout homo se ductui verbi Spiritusque Divini obsequentem præbuerit."

† Letters on Theron and Aspasio, by R. Sandeman, vol. ii. p. 396; Erskine's (Thomas) Essay on Faith, p. 129, 136; Andrew Fuller's Strictures on Sandemanianism, Letter vii.; and Essay on the Extent of the Human and Divine Agency in the Production of Saving Faith (anon.), p. 36-72. Mr Erskine, who makes faith simply mean "the belief of a true thing" (p. 20), yet says that it is "the office and prerogative of the Holy Spirit to show the truth to the hearts of men, for without His precious aid the truth

The more thoroughly, however, we recognise what I shall assume to be the Scriptural view of the nature of faith—*i. e.*, the more thoroughly we recognise faith to be a true trust in Christ, and in Him alone, for salvation—we shall be the better prepared to learn that, according to the Scriptures, faith is not, and cannot be, of ourselves, but is, and must be, the gift of God.*

For this doctrine, the main evidence furnished in Scripture consists of those statements, which occur everywhere, both in the Old and New Testament, and which lie at the very foundation of the Christian system, as to the corruption of human nature since the Fall, and also as to the provision of divine grace for its recovery. If man be by nature not only guilty and under condemnation, but “dead in trespasses and sins,”† having “no soundness in him,”‡ “without strength”§ to do God’s will, and further, “alienated from and at enmity with God,”|| his very “mind and conscience being defiled,”¶ it is evident that he cannot of himself believe in Christ, any more than he can do anything else which is his duty. Accordingly, we find that our Lord, on the same occa-

cannot be perceived nor felt, and therefore cannot be believed.”—
Essay, p. 129.

* See *Nature and Effects of Faith*, p. 33, 34.

† Eph. ii. 1. ‡ Isa. l. 6. § Rom. v. 6.

|| Col. i. 21; Rom. v. 10; Eph. iv. 18. ¶ Titus i. 15.

sion* on which He first, as far as we know, formally proclaimed the doctrine, that God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but might have everlasting life, also, and in connection with that great fundamental truth of Christianity, announced that except a man be born again he cannot enter into, nor even see, the kingdom of God.† It was as much as to say, “Though I declare unto you that whosoever believeth on Me, and thus enters into the kingdom of God, shall not perish, but shall have eternal life, remember that, in order that he may believe on Me, or enter into, or even discern, the kingdom of God, a man must be born of the Spirit.”

In confirmation, however, of the conclusion derived from the general teaching of Scripture, are many particular texts in which the divine origin

* John iii. 1-10.

† Campbell—who translates *οὐ δύναται θεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ*, “he cannot discern the kingdom of God”—thus states the import of verses 3 and 5, which he explains to be, “not synonymous, but related;” “The man who is not regenerated, is not in a capacity of perceiving the reign of God, though it were commenced. Though the kingdom of the saints on the earth were already established, the unregenerate would not discern it, because it is a spiritual, not a worldly kingdom, and capable of being no otherwise discerned. And as the kingdom itself would remain unknown to him, he could not share in the blessings enjoyed by the subjects of it.”—See whole note, Campbell’s Four Gospels, vol. ii. p. 609.

of faith is either expressly stated or distinctly implied. The more important of these are the following: Mat. xvi. 13-17, "When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, . . . Whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for *flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*" Eph. ii. 8, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that *not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*"* Eph. vi. 23, "Peace be to the

* For the authorities for both opinions as to the true construction of this disputed text, see Alford's Greek Testament *in loc.* The value of the text as evidence for the divine origin of faith is substantially the same, whether *καὶ τὸν* be supposed to refer to "faith" in particular, or "salvation" in general. But I think, with Bishop O'Brien, that no good reason has been given for departing from the more ancient and the more obvious interpretation, which makes the reference directly to "faith." There is this reason for preferring the ancient reading of the passage, that the other makes the statement of the Apostle tautological. "In the former part of the verse, the Ephesians were told that they were saved *by grace* through *faith* (*i. e.*, that this was the way in which sinners were saved under the Gospel). But no addition seems to be made to this information, nor any new strength or emphasis given to the statement, if it be said that 'their salvation was not of themselves.' Something additional, however, and important too, is told them when they are informed that 'faith is not of themselves, but is the gift of God.'"—Nature and Effects of Faith, p. 308, 310. To obviate the grammatical objection to this view, the Bishop proposes to regard the words, "and that not of your-

brethren, and love *with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" 1 Cor. xii. 3, "*No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, save by the Holy Ghost.*" Rom. xii. 3, "*I say, through the grace given to me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*" Philip. i. 29, "*Unto you it is given . . . to believe on Him.*"* Gal. v. 22, "*For the fruit of the Spirit is . . . faith.*" 2 Peter i. 1, "*Simon Peter, a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us; . . . grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.*"

Now, in the fact that faith is thus the gift of God, being the work of His Holy Spirit, there is, first, no reason against the view which is here

selves; it is the gift of God," as parenthetical, making the whole passage read thus: "*Τῇ γὰρ χάριτι ἐστε πειραμένοι διὰ τῆς πίστεως (καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, Θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον,) οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, οὐα μή τις καυχήσοται.*" The same reading was adopted by Bishop Bull. See *Harmonia Apostolica, Dissertatio Posterior, cap. xii. sec. 8.*

* Ellicott renders *ἐχαρίσθη* here, "*it was freely given,*" "the aorist being used as referring to the period when the initial grace which has since wrought in the hearts of the Philippians was first given."—Ellicott's Philip. *in loc.*

maintained as to its progressive character—*i. e.*, as to its being in its earliest stages weak and imperfect, and advancing by degrees towards perfection.

A priori, one might perhaps expect everything which is the result of a divine interposition to be, *ab initio*, perfect, and therefore incapable of advancement from a less to a more perfect state. It might even be urged that there is Scriptural authority for such an expectation in the words of the Apostle James, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”* But the truth is, that such an expectation is warranted neither by Scripture nor by experience.† We must be careful, certainly, that in ascribing any gift to God we do not impute to Him the defects with which it is marred by contact with human infirmity. Thus all that any of us can say in the case now in question is, that such faith as we have is from God, and such unbelief as mingles with it is from ourselves. That faith, however, is from God, far from justifying the belief which appears to be sometimes entertained, that all true faith must come into existence in a state absolutely perfect, is, on the contrary, the strongest possible confirmation of the doctrine that it arrives at perfec-

* James i. 17.

† See *ante*, chap. iii.

tion only by degrees. For it is thus, as we have found,* that God conducts His operations alike in the material and in the spiritual world ; the whole work of our sanctification, in particular, though confessedly a work of the Holy Spirit, being in like manner carried on progressively from small beginnings, and through much conflict and opposition, which are always, in this life, more or less successful in retarding the final result.

Nor again, secondly, in the doctrine that faith is of God, is there any discouragement to those believers who, being deeply sensible how small their own faith is, are anxious with all their hearts to have it increased ; no discouragement to such persons, but only direction as to the means to be employed by them, with the sure hope that their labour, being in the Lord, will not be in vain.

That doctrine does not even exonerate the unbelieving from the guilt of their unbelief, or exempt them from the obligation to accept without further delay the invitations of the Gospel. To maintain that those to whom the glad tidings of the grace of God are made known may fold their hands and sit still, without, in the words of Scripture, "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them," and without any feeling of personal responsibility in the "neglect" of so great "salvation," simply on the ground that faith is "not

* See *ante*, chap. iii.

of themselves, but is the gift of God," and that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord save by the Holy Ghost," is an abuse of the doctrine of Scripture so outrageous, and involving principles so demoralising, that one can hardly believe any human being in his senses to be capable of it. But every kind of folly, unhappily, seeks a sanctuary in religion, as formerly outlaws did in churches. The question, certainly, as to the mode in which the operations of divine grace may be reconciled with the freedom of the human will, has, in its speculative aspects, occupied in vain the researches of the most subtle intellects in every age of the world, and is likely to continue to prove a perfectly hopeless enigma to the end. It is a question, however, which arises not only in regard to faith, but also in reference to the whole circle of man's duty in the world.* And the same practical solution of the problem with which it is found necessary that we should satisfy ourselves in other cases must suffice here—that solution

* "The vexed question of Liberty and Necessity [one form of the problem referred to above], whose counter-arguments have become a byword for endless and unprofitable wrangling, is but one of a large class of problems, some of which *meet us at every turn of our daily life and conduct*, whenever we attempt to justify in theory that which we are compelled to carry out in practice. In religion, in morals, in our daily business, in the care of our lives, in the exercise of our senses, the rules which guide our practice cannot be reduced to principles which satisfy our reason."—Mansel's *Limits of Religious Thought*, 5th edition, p. 95.

being, that the divine sovereignty and man's responsibility, however irreconcilable by our limited faculties in the present imperfect state of our knowledge, are both revealed to us on the same authority, and are therefore to be alike accepted by us as truth.* At all events, to suppose that because faith is of God, therefore any man to whom the Gospel is addressed is excused for remaining in unbelief, would be to give the lie to Holy Scripture, which, while setting forth that doctrine as to the origin of faith, at the same time not less, but, if possible, even more, plainly invites † and commands ‡ all men § everywhere to believe in Christ, declaring also that whosoever believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.||

Let us, in short, remember that the promises and precepts of Scripture rest on the same autho-

* Even on grounds of reason the same conclusion may be arrived at. "I own freely," says Mr Locke, "the weakness of my understanding, that though it be unquestionable that there is omnipotence and omniscience in God our Maker, and I cannot have a clearer perception of anything than that I am free, yet I cannot make freedom in man consistent with omnipotence and omniscience in God, *though I am as fully persuaded of both as of any truths I most firmly assent to.*"—Locke's Works, vol. iii. p. 487.

† Isa. lv. 1; Mat. xi. 28.

‡ "This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ," 1 John iii. 23.

§ Acts ii. 39.

|| John iii. 18.

rity, and are equally important; and that we must learn our duty, not from the precepts apart from the promises, nor from the promises apart from the precepts, but from both. What God has joined let not man put asunder.

As to those who have already obeyed the Gospel by humbly putting their trust in Christ, and submitting themselves to Him as their Saviour, but who feel the need of more faith, and earnestly desire to obtain it, the doctrine that faith is God's gift ought to be hailed by all such persons as their greatest encouragement. It lays down a principle of invaluable importance to them as a guide in directing them to the source whence they must look for the increase of their faith, and likewise to the means through which it must be sought. And in leading them up to God in Christ, their reconciled Father, and that God whose grace is always sufficient for them, for His strength is made perfect in weakness, as in all senses the Author and Finisher of the faith of His people—thus, indeed, making the increase of faith an element no less than an instrument of the promised salvation—this doctrine assures them that such growth, in this respect, in the divine life, as they require, will not, if truly sought, be in any wise sought in vain. For it allows them, as regards faith no less than all other graces, to rest confident that “He who hath begun a good work

in them will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.* They therefore work out their own salvation (otherwise a work of “fear and trembling”) the more hopefully, because “it is God who worketh in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”†

* Philip. i. 6.

† Philip. ii. 12, 13. See Ellicott (*in loc.*), whose rendering of the passage is to this effect: “Complete, or carry out, your own salvation with anxious solicitude, with a distrust of your power ever to do enough. Yea, work *and be not disheartened*, for verily God is He who effectually worketh within you, both to will and to work effectually, of His good pleasure—*i. e.*, in fulfilment of it, to carry it out and satisfy it.”

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE MEANS OF FAITH'S INCREASE.

"It is obvious that, in the Christian dispensation, . . . means are made use of to accomplish ends. . . . The thing objected against this scheme of the Gospel is, that it seems to suppose God was reduced to the necessity of a long series of intricate means in order to accomplish His ends, the recovery and salvation of the world—in like sort as men, for want of understanding or power, not being able to come at their ends directly, are forced to go roundabout ways, and make use of many perplexed contrivances to arrive at them. Now, everything which we see shows the folly of this, considered as an objection against the truth of Christianity. For, according to our manner of conception, God makes use of variety of means, what we often think tedious ones, in the natural course of providence, for the accomplishment of all His ends. . . . Men are impatient, and are for precipitating things; but the Author of nature appears deliberate through all His operations, accomplishing His natural ends by slow successive steps. And there is a plan of things beforehand laid out, which, from the nature of it, requires various systems of means, as well as length of time, in order to the carrying on its several parts into execution. . . . Of this manner of operation, everything we see in the course of nature is as much an instance as any part of the Christian dispensation."—BUTLER's *Analogy*, Part II. chap. iv.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE MEANS OF FAITH'S INCREASE.

By what means shall I obtain increase of faith ? I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but not as I wish to believe in Him ; not with the strong and firm, nor with the thoroughly instructed and comprehensive, faith, the faith, too, rich in experience and spiritual insight, which I have seen in others, which I every day feel the need of for myself, and which Scripture appears to set before me as not unattainable even in this life. I want more faith. My most earnest desire is that the Lord would help my unbelief and increase my faith. There is nothing in the whole world which I long for more earnestly. I know that faith is from God : it is not of myself, it is the gift of God. He, also, by whose blessing the good seed of faith takes root at the first, is alone able to cause it to advance to maturity. It is God that giveth the increase. But God works through means. What, then, are

the means through which I may hope to receive increase of faith?

I shall here speak only of the ordinary means—those means through the diligent use of which spiritual life in general is, by God's appointment, and through His blessing, maintained and promoted, and faith not less than any other grace of the Holy Spirit. To some special means adapted to special forms of unbelief, I shall venture to solicit the attention of the reader in the chapter which follows.

I. Of ordinary means, the first, of course, which will suggest itself to every one, is Prayer—the instinctive as well as the plainly prescribed resource of all men in all times of their need. Nothing can be more clear than the general rule as laid down in Scripture: “Ask,” said our Lord, “and ye shall receive; . . . for every one that asketh receiveth. . . . If ye, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him?”* And St Paul, “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”† Such is the rule. And if there be any case in which, more than another, prayer appears to be peculiarly becoming, and any case in

* Mat. vii. 7, 11.

† Philip. iv. 6.

which it is likely to be more than ordinarily acceptable and efficacious, it is that of a man who, feeling deeply his urgent need of more faith in Christ than he has yet attained, is saying to the Lord, "Increase my faith." If we are to pray for anything in the world, we ought surely, after the example of the Apostles and other holy men in Scripture, to pray for a blessing which is so expressly declared to be God's own gift, and for which it is so certain that we can never ask amiss.

Our Lord, indeed, has been pleased to give a special warrant for such an application of the means of grace now referred to, by introducing what is virtually a petition for increase of faith into that form of prayer which He himself composed for the use of the disciples. For in the Lord's Prayer we are taught, as for daily bread, and as for the forgiveness of our sins, to pray, from day to day, to our Father who is in heaven, "Thy kingdom come!"—that is, to pray not only that the kingdom of glory may be hastened, but also that, in the mean time, the kingdom of grace may be in all respects advanced, and advanced in our own hearts no less than in the world.

It is sometimes supposed that prayer for faith in any shape is, from the nature of the case, unlawful and ineffectual. How prayer can ever be *unlawful*, it is difficult to imagine. Prayer is a duty

required of all men* by Almighty God, and, as in the case of Simon Magus, required even of those who are confessedly in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.† The hypocrisy of our prayers, the unbelief which mingles with them, the wickedness of our own hearts even when we pray—these things, in whatever degree they may be found, are *in all of us* doubtless unlawful, hateful to God, an abomination unto the Lord.‡ But prayer itself can certainly never be unlawful in the case of

* Ps. lxv. 2 ; Luke xviii. 1.

† Acts viii. 22, 23. For examples of views directly opposed to the spirit and letter of the instruction given in this case to Simon, see Edwards's *Gangraena* (e.g., p. 27, “wicked and unregenerate men ought not to pray to God at all”), and Wesley's *Journals, passim*. In the latter the following remarkable passage occurs, under date July 16, 1740: “One desired me to look into an old book, and give her my judgment of it. This I found was ‘The Mystic Divinity of Dionysius,’ and several extracts. . . . I borrowed the book, and going in the evening to Fetter Lane, read one of those extracts to this effect: ‘The Scriptures are good ; prayer is good ; communicating is good ; relieving our neighbour is good ; but to one who is not born of God none of these is good, but all very evil. *For him to read the Scriptures, or to pray, or to communicate, or to do any outward work, is deadly poison.* First let him be born of God ; till then let him not do any of these things, for if he does he destroys himself.’ After reading this twice or thrice over as distinctly as I could, I asked, ‘My brethren, is this right or is it wrong?’ Mr Bell answered immediately, ‘It is right.’ . . . Many then laboured to prove that my brother and I laid too much stress upon the ordinances. To put this matter beyond dispute, ‘I (said Mr Bowes) used the ordinances twenty years, yet I found not Christ ; but *I left them off only for a few weeks, and I found Him then.*’”—*Journals*, p. 119.

‡ Prov. xxviii. 9.

any man ; and above all, prayer for so excellent a gift as faith.* Then, as to such prayer being in the nature of the case ineffectual, why should it be so ? I can understand those fanatics who maintain that all means of grace whatever are, in all circumstances, contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, holding prayer for faith to be necessarily unavailing. I can also understand such a belief on the part of persons in whose opinion nothing is worthy of the name of faith, or avails for our acceptance with God, except faith in a state absolutely perfect—a faith, in short, which has no gradations, but arrives at full maturity in the moment when it is first called into existence. I can understand such persons saying that prayer for faith must be vain, because it can never be acceptable to God until it is no longer needed. But if we believe that means of grace are appointed in Scripture, and that the blessing of God is promised to their use—and if we believe further, that, instead of being perfected in the moment in which it is first given us by God, faith is, on the contrary, progressive, weak at its birth, and growing up to a more perfect state of development only by degrees—what reason can we have for supposing all prayer for faith to be necessarily ineffectual and unavailing ? Without faith, certainly, it is impossible to please God, and we must ask in faith

* James iv. 3.

that we may receive.* But why may we not ask at once in faith and for faith? The father of the demoniac in the Gospels did both. Being told that all things are possible to him that believeth, "he straightway cried out, with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."† Indeed, what is all sincere and earnest prayer—*i.e.*, all prayer which *is* prayer—but itself an act of perhaps feeble, perhaps unconscious, but not the less true, faith in God?

Let me support the view here taken by the authority of an eminent writer already often referred to. Speaking of those who, upon every exhortation to the use of prayer by the weak in faith, are ready to exclaim, "What! desire a man to pray before he has faith!" the Bishop of Ossory says: "We do not desire a man to pray before he has faith. The Apostle sufficiently guards us against such an error, if it were possible to fall into one which is so like a contradiction in terms. He tells us that it is impossible to approach God acceptably without faith; but he at the same time declares expressly the kind of faith which is necessary to enable us to draw nigh to Him; and we should surely beware how we add to the conditions. 'He that cometh to Him,' saith he, 'must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' Now, is not

* Heb. xi. 6; James i. 6.

† Mark ix. 24.

prayer to God (I do not mean a repetition of words, but real prayer) the proper expression of this kind of faith, presupposing it and prerequiring it? And is not a man, who is convinced upon the evidence of the Bible that faith in Christ is the gift of God, and that He is ready to bestow it upon all who ask it, in a condition to offer this prayer, which is *of faith and for faith?* Doubtless he is. . . . If any of you be convinced by God's Word that you are lost sinners, and that it is only by faith in Christ that you can be saved; and if you feel that your faith in Him falls far short of that entire trust in Him which He deserves and demands; and if you believe, on the same evidence, that faith is the gift of God, and that God is a hearer of prayer;—thrust from you the frigid system, as shallow and false as it is cold, which would bar your access to the throne of grace, and stifle the cry of spiritual distress from rising to him before whom it never rose in vain. In the self-abasement of conscious guilt—in the self-renunciation of conscious helplessness—with the fervour of heartfelt poverty, and nakedness, and blindness, and misery, implore Him who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not, that He would help your unbelief and increase your faith, and it shall be unto you even as you will.”*

* *Nature and Effects of Faith*, p. 46, 47.

II. Perhaps, however, the most characteristic of the means through which it may be expected that the grace of faith will be increased, is that through which it is first implanted in the heart—namely, the Word of God. For as “faith cometh by . . . the Word of God,” so those who already believe are taught, “as new-born babes,” to “desire the sincere milk of the Word, that [in this respect, doubtless, no less than in others] they may grow thereby.”*

There are many ways in which the Word of God rightly used is a means of faith’s increase.

(1.) In the first place, for example, it affords the materials out of which directly or indirectly, and with or without aid from other sources, the evidence of the truth of Christianity is constructed. It is its own witness—a witness to its own inspiration, and to the certainty of those things in which it instructs us. It is of such a character that it not only reveals to us what we should believe, but for what reasons. Accordingly those who attack and those who defend the divine authority of the religion of Christ, those whose object is to confirm their unbelief, and those whose object is to increase their faith, alike make the Holy Scriptures their principal study. Chillingworth called the Bible the religion of Protestants; it is not only our religion, but the evidence of our religion. The more we become acquainted with the Bible, as the more

* Rom. x. 17; 1 Pet. ii. 2.

we become acquainted with any of the other works of God, we find in it as in them the more convincing proofs of a divine workmanship. Both in the inspired volume on the one hand, and on the other hand in creation and providence, there is much certainly which is inexplicable to us, much which even might tempt us to doubt whether either can be attributed to infinite wisdom and goodness. But we find more which leaves us no alternative but to confess as to both that they are alike from God. It is, of course, not without the aids of profound learning (and there is no kind or extent of learning which may not be brought to bear upon the subject), nor without other intellectual gifts in like manner denied to the great majority of men, that the full value of the testimony of Scripture to the truth of religion can be appreciated ; and many of the researches by which the nature and force of that testimony are ascertained must be always confined to the learned, and the results accepted by others on their authority at second hand. Even, however, to ordinary readers of the Bible, who search the Scriptures with few other advantages than those which are supplied by an honest desire to attain to the truth, and a readiness to seek for it patiently and with diligence, it will be found that the inspired volume affords the means of its own verification, and, as far as the confirmation of their belief in the truth of religion is re-

quired for that purpose, is therefore a means of increasing their faith.

(2.) But, again, the right use of the Word of God increases our faith by increasing our knowledge of Christ and the doctrine of Christ. A great part of the defects of the faith of the believer arises from ignorance. We do not believe as heartily in Christ as we ought to do, because we do not know Him aright, and we do not believe as comprehensively in His doctrine (which is but a reflection of Himself) as we ought to do, because we do not know it fully and in its whole extent. For that thorough knowledge of the truth without which a faith in every respect great is impossible, we must repair to Scripture, digging there as for hid treasures, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and persevering in the diligent and earnest study of the whole volume. I will here assume that the Bible is the only and all-sufficient rule of faith. Other means for the attainment of that knowledge of divine truth which is indispensable to an advanced faith in Christ are of course accessible to us. We may learn the truth from those who have themselves found it in Scripture; and, in fact, in so doing we but conform to a practice which has a divine sanction in the appointment of the ministry of men for the spiritual instruction and edification of one another. It need hardly be said, however, that the study of the

truths of God, in the words which He himself has inspired, is, on many accounts, of the greatest importance. The Scriptures are not only of themselves able to make us wise unto salvation, but they have this recommendation, that they present to us not partial and one-sided views of doctrine, but the whole counsel of God, and set before us not only truth, but truth without admixture of error.

(3.) Once more, the right use of the Word of God is a means of increasing our faith, inasmuch as that Word is an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit for the communication of divine grace. It is "the power of God" as well as "the wisdom of God;" it not only "enlightens the eyes," but "converts the heart."*

Let it only be added that in employing the Scriptures in any of these ways, the last no less than the others, as a means for the increase of our faith (or indeed for any other purpose), our great object ought to be to arrive at its true meaning. There is no magical charm in the letter of Scripture. We shall not in any way grow in faith by merely reading, but only by understanding, the Bible. Not the words but only the truths of inspiration produce in any way this effect. There can be no doubt that the great reason of the weakness, in all respects, of most men's faith is not that they do not read, but that they do not understand

* 1 Cor. i. 24; Ps. xix. 7, 8.

their Bibles. Whether, therefore, we regard it as a means of enlightening our understandings, or as a means of touching our hearts, our first object in the use of the Word ought to be to attain to a knowledge of the truth which is there contained.

III. Among the ordinary means of grace which, rightly used, may be expected to be made conducive to the increase of faith, are not only prayer and the Word, with other religious ordinances,* but the whole Discipline of Life, and especially the Discipline of Trial and Affliction.

In fact, for all high attainments in the spiritual life, trials are not only useful but indispensable; and for the highest, not only trials, but trials of more than ordinary severity. Such appears to be the teaching of Scripture throughout,† and it ought, for many reasons, to be kept in view. Especially ought it to be kept in view for the purpose of discouraging false expectations. Men sitting at ease under their own vines and fig-trees, worshipping God according to their consciences

* According to the teaching of the Reformers, the sacraments had the peculiar office assigned them of serving as means for the increase of the faith of believers. Thus Calvin: “Constituimus sacramenta verè nominari testimonia gratiæ Dei ac veluti quædam benevolentia, qua erga nos affectus est, sigilla: quæ ipsam nobis obsignando, fidem nostram hoc modo sustinent, alunt, confirmant, adaugent.”—Inst. lib. IV. cap. xiv. sec. 7.

† Ps. cxix. 71; Mal. iii. 2, 3; Heb. xii. 11; Rev. vii. 14, 15.

unquestioned, with none to make them afraid of their profession of attachment to Christ, and otherwise (for trial comes in many shapes) having no extraordinary occasion for a great faith—no extraordinary difficulties or sorrows of any kind to require it or call it forth—may thank God that they escape not only terrible sufferings which others, their fellow-Christians, have endured, but a grievous temptation which others, their fellow-Christians, have not always overcome, and never without difficulty and hazard. Such men must, however, remember that they enjoy this immunity from unusual sufferings and dangers not without cost ; and especially they must remember that, being exempted from the trials and temptations of these their brethren in the faith, they are also shut out from their reward. As they have not suffered like these men, so they cannot hope to believe like them. It is no fault of theirs: the only fault would be to murmur against the dispensation of the Almighty. The furnace seven times heated has not been prepared for them, nor the silver seven times refined. It has been the will of God that they should not pass through conditions indispensable to the greatest faith, and therefore have not attained it. In such circumstances, they, in fact, could not possibly have attained it.

When Agrippa, appealed to by Paul at Cesarea, said, sneeringly, "Almost thou persuadest me to

be a Christian ;” the Apostle, holding up his manacled hands, cried out, “ I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, *except these bonds!*”* Of course, what he meant was merely to express, with the courtesy and good feeling habitual to him, his wish that Agrippa had been a Christian. Could any man, however, be “ altogether ” such as Paul was in faith, without having been such as he was in trials ? Could any man believe “ altogether ” as he did, without having suffered as he had done ? Had not “ these bonds ” helped to make him what he was ? Had not his faith grown in prison, grown under stripes and indignities and privations, and that agony which, to one so active and zealous as he was, must have been intolerable—the agony of enforced abstinence from the work which he had so much at heart ? Had it not so grown by these trials as it could not have grown without them ? It is sometimes the wish, perhaps even the hope, of men of ordinary experiences—men who hardly know what trials are—that they might reach the exceptional faith of the martyrs, and others “ who have come out of great tribulation.”† Futile ambition : as futile as it is presumptuous ! To sit at the right and left hand of the Son of man either here or hereafter, one must drink of the cup of

* Acts xxvi. 28, 29.

† Rev. vii. 14.

which He also drank, and be baptised with the baptism with which He also was baptised.* Little indeed do they know what they ask who ask to be greatest, whether in the kingdom of grace or in the kingdom of glory. Let it, however, be the consolation of those who have been called upon to suffer the heaviest trials in this life, and who have not suffered in vain, that without such discipline it is not possible that they could have been "altogether" such as they are. And as for others, let them remember that they too may have a true and even a great faith, but not the greatest.

The whole discipline of life, however, is a means appointed by God for the promotion of faith, and of all other Christian graces. Our labours, our trials of every kind, our experiences, our successes and failures, our very errors, may, by the divine blessing, be made instrumental to our increase in faith.

Thus, even our intercourse with an unbelieving world—a world ready enough to proclaim its own unbelief, and unscrupulous enough in calling in question the most cherished convictions of the faithful—is, however unlike our hours of devotion, or of sweet fellowship with those who are like-minded with ourselves, not more a trial than an aid to our faith. The history of the Church is in this respect a type of the history of the individual

* Mark x. 35.

Christian. The assaults of unbelievers against the evidences of Christianity, and the inroads of heretics on its doctrines, have been among the means by which the Church of Christ has grown and multiplied; and grown not only in extent, but in purity and in strength. The more the truth of the Gospel has been questioned, its evidence has been the more carefully sifted and found to be the more thoroughly trustworthy. The more its doctrines have been misrepresented, the more have they been studied, and the better have they been understood. The divine authority of the Scriptures, therefore, could not have been so well ascertained as it is to-day, nor the doctrine of Christ so fully known to us, and guarded so perfectly from corruption, but for the frequent attacks to which at once the evidence and teaching of Christianity have been exposed in the world. Thus has God made the wrath of man to praise Him as regards the progress of the Church.* And so it is with the individual believer. In his ordinary intercourse with other men he has to endure the same conflict as the Church endures, and, if he be true to himself, with a like result. It has been said that in ordinary affairs of this life "a man learns much by contradiction. The collision of society compels him to state his opinions clearly, to defend them, to modify them when in-

* Gerard's *Dissertations*, p. 305-428.

defensible—perhaps to surrender them altogether, consciously or unconsciously—still more often to absorb them into larger and fuller thoughts, less forcible but more comprehensive.”* To some extent this is true of the believer in Christ in regard even to his faith.† In everyday life he is called upon to meet not only those who agree with, but those who more or less differ from, him in his religious opinions. He hears the truth not only preached but spoken against. He cannot live in the world and listen only to one side of the controversies to which the Gospel continually gives rise among men. His ears are often pained by the sound of words which to him appear perhaps blasphemous—at least contrary to sound doctrine; and if the discipline be only rightly met, well it is for him that such is his lot! He may even learn, indeed, something from the enemies as well as from the friends of the faith—something, should he learn nothing more than the duty of frequently reconsidering the grounds on which rest his own hope in Christ.

In conclusion, let it be remembered that none of the means of grace will avail for the increase of faith, or for any benefit to our souls, without diligence and carefulness and perseverance on our part. Our progress depends primarily on the

* Essays and Reviews, p. 34.

† Development of Christian Doctrine, p. 38.

means being furnished, but not less essentially on their being rightly employed. Not any of them—whether prayer, or the Word, or affliction, or other discipline of this life—will otherwise serve to promote our spiritual growth. On the contrary, if we enjoy the highest possible spiritual privileges, and neglect or abuse them, the result, of course, will be not progress but retrogression: slighted mercies being indeed transmuted into judgments in this respect no less than in others—a truth familiar enough to us all, but one which cannot be too often recalled to our minds.

Let it also be remembered that, although the different means by which grace is conveyed, whether for the increase of faith or for any other spiritual gift, may be classified separately, they are not to be dissevered in our use of them, as if any one of them would prove available apart from the others. All of them are, in fact, connected together by an indissoluble bond, their strength and virtue, as in the old man's faggot in the fable, being in their union. Not the Word without prayer, nor prayer without the Word, nor either without trial, nor trial without them, will avail: all these, as all things, working, not separately, but “together,”* for our good.

* Rom. viii. 28.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE HINDRANCES TO FAITH'S INCREASE.

“The change of our mind is one of the greatest alterations in nature, which cannot be compassed in any way or within any time we please; but it must proceed on leisurely and regularly, in such order, by such steps, as the nature of things doth permit: it must be wrought by a resolute and laborious perseverance; by a watchful application of mind in voiding prejudices, in waiting for advantages, in attending to all we do; by forcibly wresting our nature from its bent, and swimming against the current of impetuous desires; by a patient disentangling ourselves from practices most agreeable and familiar to us; by a weary fencing with temptations, by long struggling with manifold oppositions and difficulties; whence the Holy Scripture termeth our practice a warfare, wherein we are to fight many a bloody battle with most redoubtable foes; a combat, which must be managed with our best skill and utmost might; a race, which we must pass through with incessant activity and swiftness.”—BARROW’s *Works*, vol. iii. p. 138.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE HINDRANCES TO FAITH'S INCREASE.

AMONGST the means by which the faith of the believer receives accessions, might have been mentioned the removal of certain hindrances which often interrupt the progress in this respect of his spiritual growth. But it will be more convenient to consider such hindrances separately ; and to this task the reader is now invited.

The native tendency (if one may so speak) of true faith is, as we have seen, towards increase ; and when due means are rightly used, increase follows, therefore, in natural course, unless some disturbing influence is interposed. That such disturbing influence is at work is the reason why, in the case of many sincere followers of Christ, notwithstanding much diligence and perseverance in the employment of all the means of grace, little progress is actually made. What these hindrances are, and how they may be obviated, are, therefore, questions of the highest importance.

I. One of the most distressing of them is to be found in a species of what must be called *mental aberration, in connection with the subject of religion*, from which some of the best men and truest Christians (as far as can be judged) have suffered more or less, often only for a time, but not unseldom during the greater part of their lives.

It is impossible and unnecessary to enter here at any length into the wide question of the causes of religious monomania: a kind of insanity which, both in its milder and in its more acute forms, has been recognised by physicians since the remotest times.* I shall only say that the popular notion that the mental delusions which relate to religion are necessarily, or usually, the result of religious impressions, is not supported by the authority of the most eminent medical psychologists. That hopes and fears connected with the unseen world are sometimes causes of insanity in the case of persons of excitable temperament, exposed to injudicious spiritual teaching, is true, and an important truth. It may warn us that religious zeal ought to be under the guidance of knowledge and discretion, and that there are cases in which even an attention to the highest of all duties may require to be subjected to regulation. But the

* Esquirol, *Des Maladies Mentales*, tome i. p. 484, and tome ii. p. 432.

prevalent belief as to the relations of religion to insanity depend upon an imperfect acquaintance with the subject. Dr Prichard, a high authority on such questions, enters at considerable length into an inquiry as to the extent to which religious impressions are causes of insanity, and his conclusion may here be quoted in his own words: "As a matter of fact," he says, "there is reason to believe that the number of persons who become insane through the influence of religious hopes and fears is much less considerable than it is generally supposed to be. The circumstance that the mind of a lunatic is occupied during the period of his disease with ideas and feelings connected with the invisible world, is no proof whatever that the derangement of his understanding was produced in the first instance by impressions related to the same subject. To a mind already prepared by disease to indulge fearful thoughts and gloomy forebodings, the unknown future opens a wide field which the imagination is likely to select, and it often dwells upon the evils which it anticipates in another stage of existence, when the original cause of derangement has been some misfortune of the present life, or perhaps some merely physical influence." *

* *Treatise of Insanity*, by J. C. Prichard, M.D., p. 187. See also, at p. 189, his evidence for the fact that "the preparatory circumstances and the foundation of religious insanity are not limited

Whatever may be its causes, religious insanity, both in those forms in which it is universally recognised, and in modes of development in which it is less easily detected, exists widely. It assumes many shapes. Burton—no great authority, certainly—classifies the persons subject to it under a twofold division, “according to those two extremes of excess and defect, impiety and superstition, idolatry and atheism.”* It appears in the form of devotional ecstasy (*extasis religiosa*), and of the most distressing despondency: sometimes, indeed, alternating in the same individual.† Morbid credulity and morbid scepticism are different phases of the same disease. In some men, too, there is found to be a constitutional obliquity of understanding, which prevents them from arriving at fixed and decided convictions on any subject; and the subject on which this morbid action of the

in their extent to nations and times in which religion has existed in any particular form.” M. Esquirol (*Des Maladies Mentales*, ii. 726) notices the remarkable result of experience in France, immediately after the Revolution, as to the effect, not of religion, but of *irreligion*, on insanity. He shows that the indifference to religion which so extensively prevailed among the people of that country at the period in question, was a means of producing, directly or indirectly, *more madness than all their political calamities*.

* Anatomy of Melancholly, part iii. sec. 4.

† Feuchtersleben’s Medical Psychology (Sydenham Society ed.), p. 252. See also detailed accounts of religious insanity, as developed in convent life, in Calmeil’s two volumes, *De la Folie depuis la Renaissance des Sciences*, &c.

mind manifests itself is often religion.* No reasoning, no amount of diligence, no spiritual any more than intellectual means, appear to have their due effect in leading to settled belief in such persons. One of the commonest forms, however, in which religious monomania manifests itself is weak faith, of that terrible description of which so well known an example is afforded in the case of the poet Cowper.† Of course his was an extreme case; but the combination in Cowper of an unreasoning and wholly groundless despondency, or rather despair, as regarded his own religious prospects in particular, with a sound religious faith otherwise, is, in some shape, not so uncommon a

* "Weakness of faith is partly constitutional. . . . A man may be perfectly unable to acquire a firm and undoubting belief of the great truths of religion. . . . A state of great pain and of most severe trial, to be pitied heartily, but not to be condemned."—Dr Arnold to the Lady Francis Egerton, Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, p. 249.

† Cowper's delusion, which consisted in the belief that there was hope in Christ for all men but himself, leaves traces of its presence in some of the most beautiful of his verses, no less than in those more evidently insane utterances which Southey, with questionable propriety, has printed in his life of the poet. It appears, for instance, in the 'Contrite Heart,' a hymn written during one of his earlier attacks—

"Thy saints are comforted, I know,
And love Thy house of prayer;
I therefore go where others go,
But find no comfort there;"

and especially in 'The Castaway,' "the last original piece that he composed," Southey says; adding, "and, all circumstances considered, one of the most affecting that ever was composed."

phenomenon as might be imagined in the history of mental disease.

It is obvious that in cases of weak faith, in which the defect originates in morbid states of the mind itself, the ordinary means of grace cannot of themselves avail to bring about a cure. In such cases it is even sometimes a serious question how far treatment suitable for ordinary experiences, instead of being useful, may not be injurious. I shall not attempt to prescribe for sufferers of the description now referred to. Their health—perhaps only the general bodily health, perhaps even the soundness of the mind itself—is at fault; and the only counsel that can be here given is, that no time should be lost in applying for medical advice. Let me repeat that ordinary means are unavailing, and may be mischievous. "It is a general rule," says a professional writer already quoted, "long since established as a maxim among physicians who have made insanity their principal study, not to direct the attention of their patients to the subjects on which their illusions turn."^{*} "A most interesting affection of this class [monomania]," says Dr Abercrombie, "consists of deep but erroneous views of religion, generally accompanied with disturbed sleep and considerable derangement of the system, and producing a state of mind closely bordering upon insanity. It occurs

* Prichard, p. 301, 303.

most generally in young persons of acute and susceptible feelings, and requires the most delicate and cautious management. Two modes of treatment are frequently adopted in regard to it, both equally erroneous ; the one consists of hurrying the individual into the distractions of company or a rapid journey, the other in urging religious discussion and books of profound divinity. Both are very injudicious, but especially the latter ; for every attempt to discuss the important subject to which the distorted impression refers, only serves to fix the hallucination more deeply." *

II. Another common hindrance to faith's increase is of a very different character from that just mentioned, not having its seat in the mind itself, but in external circumstances, and not peculiar to any one class of believers.

I refer to the difficulties which are generally known to exist in regard to some parts of the evidence and teaching of Holy Scripture : difficulties which, though insufficient in the face of

* Abercrombie on the Intellectual Powers, p. 308. So also Dr Samuel Johnson, who could speak of such affections from painful personal experience : " Talking of constitutional melancholy," writes his biographer, " he observed,—‘A man so afflicted, sir, must divert distressing thoughts, and not combat with them. *Boswell*.—‘ May he not think them down, sir?’ *Johnson*.—‘ No, sir ; to think them down is madness.’ ”—Boswell's Life of Johnson, vol. ii. p. 23.

overpowering evidence and the aids of divine grace, wholly to subvert our faith, yet may grievously impede and disturb it, interrupting its progress to maturity, and indeed, in many cases, instead of a comfort and a joy to us, making it for a time a source of unspeakable wretchedness and misery.

In what way is this formidable obstacle to faith's increase to be obviated?

The first, and not one of the least important, means to be adopted for this purpose is, to learn frankly to recognise and acknowledge the fact that such difficulties exist, and are, at least in the present state of our knowledge, insurmountable; nay, that many of them we need not expect ever to be able to solve in this world. Peter speaks of some things in Paul's Epistles (as also in the other Scriptures) which are hard to be understood, and which the unlearned and unstable even wrest to their own destruction;* and Paul himself, in one of these very Epistles, says, "How unsearchable are God's judgments, and His ways past finding out!"† They, as believers, therefore, admitted the difficulties of Christianity. And for our own peace, as well as for our progress in the faith, it is of the greatest moment that all of us who are Christians, like them, should learn to acknowledge the same truth. Why are the difficulties of Chris-

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

† Rom. xi. 33.

tianity so injurious to our faith and comfort? One of the chief reasons is, I believe, to be found in the fact that we deem it necessary to shut our eyes to them, and are afraid to think of them as anything but the wicked inventions of infidels, or the weak imaginings of the ignorant. We suppose that did we once give harbour to the admission that any real difficulties are to be found in reference either to the doctrine or evidence of Christianity, we should lose all certainty in our belief, and be even hurried on to the dreadful condition of denying the faith altogether. We attempt to shut our eyes, therefore; although, of course, all the while our consciousness that such difficulties exist continues to exercise a prejudicial effect on our comfort and progress.

Now this is great weakness, and as hurtful as it is foolish. The plain truth is that there *are* difficulties in Scripture, even by its own acknowledgement—many things in the revelation which God has given us, and many things in the method adopted by God in making that revelation, which no man can explain the reason of: and we must look this truth in the face if we would place our faith on a sound and therefore on a stable and firm foundation. We shall soon learn, in that case, to give the difficulties which thus exist no more than their true value and importance, especially when we remember that there are similar

difficulties connected with all truth, the world being indeed full of things mysterious, inexplicable, at variance with man's preconceptions and judgments.* Nor can we, at the same time, fail ere long to perceive, what is certainly the case, whether it be perceived by us or not, that, whatever the difficulties in question—even should they be ten thousand times more serious than they in fact are—the Gospel is strong enough to keep its ground in spite of them.

I do not mean to say that they are not serious. They are very real and great trials of our faith, those difficulties to which I have referred. They are trials not less severe than the allurements of pleasure, or the enticements of sinners, or the temptations of Satan. And I may add that they ought to be so dealt with as we deal with other forms of the discipline of our heavenly Father, who, although He will not suffer us to be tempted more than we are able, but with every temptation gives us a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it, is yet pleased thus to chasten even them whom He loves, that by trial they may be perfected. “The speculative difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved, may,” as Butler has suggested, “make even the principal part of some person's trial.”† Let them be dealt with, then, like other trials—that is, submitted to, as

* 1 Cor. x. 13; Heb. xii. 6-11.

† Analogy, part II. ch. vi.

visitations from God, patiently and humbly ; our great duty in regard to them being, to refuse on their account to distrust God, or to neglect the great salvation, or to give indulgence to unholy or careless living, and in spite of them to hold on our way immovably unto the end.

Another means to be employed by those whose progress in faith is hindered by sceptical difficulties, is a careful study of the evidences on which the question of the truth of Christianity must always ultimately rest.

It may not be here out of place to say that such a study of the Christian evidences is incumbent on all Christians,—incumbent even on those of them who are not molested by any doubts arising from the difficulties to which I am now referring. No much more fatal mistake can be fallen into than that of supposing that the evidences of their religion do not need to be inquired into by ordinary Christian believers—that is, by those who have already practically accepted the religion of Christ as true—or that there is even more evil than good (for to this extent the principle is not unfrequently carried) to be anticipated from inquiries on the part of such persons into these evidences. The view that those who speak in this way take, is, that such inquiries are alone to be recommended in the case of infidels, or of men who, if not infidels, are at least troubled with

sceptical doubts. I believe they are very important in the case of every man, and not only for the increase but even for the maintenance of his faith. It is not meant, of course, that we should be continually reopening the question of the truth of Christianity from the foundation. But it cannot fail to be useful to us to take the necessary means for confirming and establishing the faith in which we already rest, by a knowledge of those arguments and evidences which approve themselves to the reason. Which of us can hope to be safe from the intrusion of temptations on the subject of the very foundations of religious belief: temptations addressed to the intellect, and which, if not always, are often, best met on their own ground? Nay, may not the presence of latent infidelity be more frequently the secret cause of sins of unbelief and defects of faith of every kind than we are aware of? Such infidelity is at least widely prevalent. Speaking of the certainty of things believed, Hooker says, "Of them at some time who doubteth not? I will not here allege," he adds, "the sundry confessions of the perfectest that have lived upon earth concerning their great imperfections in this way: which if I did, I should dwell too long upon a matter sufficiently known by every faithful man that doth know himself."*

* Of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect: Hooker's Works, vol. ii. p. 588.

And if the careful study of the Christian evidences be desirable in the case of every man, it is, above all, imperative in the case of those whose minds are already in any degree disturbed by misgivings and tormenting doubts in connection with the difficulties of Scripture.

For the thorough escape from these misgivings and tormenting doubts, however, the believer must look, lastly and especially, to the results of his progress, upon the whole, in the Christian life.

It is a common delusion—not confined to persons troubled with difficulties as to the evidences, but prevalent among all inquirers—that the search after divine truth is purely an intellectual effort, to be conducted in the same way as the pursuit of human science, by intellectual means—that is, by examining, with the aid of books or conversation, the reasonings and evidences on either side, and dispassionately judging between them. No delusion is more fatal. We have just found that intellectual means have their own place, and an important one. They are often perhaps too much neglected. “It seems to me,” says Baxter, “the ordinary cause of backsliding when men either begin at the affections, or spend most of their labours there before they have laid a good foundation in the understanding.”* Bishop Jeremy

* *Saints' Everlasting Rest.*

Taylor, to the same purpose, speaking of the "means and instruments to obtain faith," says, "It is a prudent course that in our health and best advantages we lay up particular arguments and instruments of persuasion and confidence, to be brought forth and used in the great day of expense."^{*} Then, it is written in Scripture, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you *a reason* of the hope that is in you."[†] While, however, intellectual means are requisite, they are not sufficient; and it cannot be too often recalled to our minds that, according to its own principles, the only knowledge of religion which is worth anything is that which is gained, not certainly without reading and reflection, by a practical experience of the Christian life.[‡] "My doctrine," said our Lord to the Jews, "is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."[§] And the Psalmist, in like manner: "What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way that he shall choose. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant."^{||}

I need not say that it is not impossible for a man who sees difficulties in Scripture which tend to interfere with his faith, yet practically to believe

* *Holy Living*, chap. IV. sec. i.

† *1 Pet. iii. 15.*

‡ *John x. 24, 26.*

§ *John vii. 16, 17.*

|| *Ps. xxv. 12, 14.*

in and submit himself to Christ. He can believe and obey the Gospel to the extent of his present light and convictions. Nor is this only possible ; it is such a man's unquestionable duty. He has no right to remain at a distance from the Saviour, as far as the Saviour is known to him, or to disobey the truth as far as he knows it, merely because he does not know the whole. His duty is to act up to his present light at once ; waiting for more light, but waiting not from without but from within the Church. But still further: it is not only possible, and also obligatory—a bounden duty—to obey the Gospel even in the midst of darkness, but this is the surest means of reaching the light. Let those who find in Scripture "things hard to be understood," persevere notwithstanding in living up to the light which they have received, and giving practical effect to the convictions which they have attained to, dim and imperfect though these convictions and that light may be ; and in so doing they will not only fulfil what is their undoubted, though difficult, duty in such circumstances, but they will take the most effectual means for an eventual deliverance from their present trial. The daily work and daily experience of the Christian life will, ere long, of themselves sweep away many a difficulty which defies the learning and ingenuity of the schools ; the progress of Christian experience will not only

diminish the number of our difficulties, but will increase our tolerance for those that remain ; and in the spirit of the blind man restored to sight—who said, in reply to the Scribes and Pharisees, “Whether Christ be a sinner or no, I know not : one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see” *—we, looking back on what we have ourselves tasted and seen of the goodness of the Lord, will be enabled, if not to explain, at least to disregard, whatever seems to present difficulties in the way of our perfect faith in Christ, saying that we are “not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ,” for we have ourselves found it, in our own cases, to be “the power of God unto salvation.” † And what more would we have ?

III. One of the most serious obstacles to the progress and increase of the faith of believers is sometimes found in their own careless, worldly, and unholy living : an obstacle the existence of which it is painful to acknowledge, but would be foolish to refuse to acknowledge, as possible, even in the case of true disciples of Christ. Unhappily, a true Christian may for a time become less spiritually minded, less pure in life and in heart, than he ought from his profession and privileges to be always ; he may even be living a life which he himself knows to be sinful, and much more may

* John ix. 25.

† Rom. i. 16.

he, through a neglect of watchfulness and self-trial, fall into sins of ignorance. We find the Psalmist praying to God, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults; keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins."* Who is there that may not so pray? "A great and too common cause of doubting and discomfort," says Richard Baxter, who could speak from extensive experience in matters of this kind, "is the secret maintaining of some known sin. . . . One would think," he adds, "that a soul that lieth under the fears of wrath, and is so tender as to tremble and complain, should be as tender of sinning, and scarce adventure upon the appearance of evil; *and yet, sad experience telleth us that it is frequently otherwise*: I have known too many such that would complain and yet sin, and accuse themselves and yet sin still, yea, and despair and yet proceed in sinning; and all arguments and means could not keep them from the wilful committing of that sin, again and again, which yet they themselves did think would prove their destruction."† A careless or sinful life is indeed not only necessarily inconsistent with a prosperous and advancing faith, but is so often an occasion of grieving the Holy Spirit of God, and turning away from the believer the brightness of God's coun-

* Psalm xix. 12, 13.

† Saints' Rest, part III. chap. viii. sec. 8.

nance, that when faith becomes feeble, and, with other spiritual graces, decays in the soul, our first duty is to search and try wherefore it is that the Lord is contending with us—that is, what we have done to offend God.* Nor will any means of grace we may use—any prayers, or reading, or waiting on God in the ordinances of public worship—avail to increase our faith, or even to sustain it, unless we put away from us the sins of life or heart which thus “separate between us and our God, and hide His face from us that He will not hear.”†

There may be other hindrances and obstacles, alike at least in this respect with those now mentioned, that they prevent the faith of the Christian from following the law of its existence, which is growth. Whatever these may be, it is, of course, of the greatest moment that they should be discovered, and that appropriate steps should be taken to remove them out of the way.

* Job x. 2.

† Isa. lix. 2; Psalm lxxvii. 6.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

“ Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and estate of salvation—which hope of theirs shall perish—yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.”—*Westminster Confession of Faith*.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

IS assurance of faith (as popularly understood)—*i.e.*, an assurance on the part of the believer that he is in a state of salvation—attainable in this life? and, if attainable, is it indispensable? What, too, are the means by which, if at all, assurance may be attained? These are questions which, at many periods in the history of the Church, have engaged, and which engage in our own day, the most anxious attention of multitudes of religious inquirers. They are questions of much importance in a practical point of view; they have been largely considered in theological literature; and they find, I believe, an adequate (as it is a final) solution in Holy Scripture. They have been already incidentally referred to oftener than once in the preceding pages. I shall not here recur to the *history* of the doctrine. It may be useful,

however, to attempt to bring together within a narrow compass those statements of Scripture which appear to bear most directly on the doctrine itself, especially in its more practical aspects.

In the first place, then, there is the question whether a state of assurance of grace and salvation is, in any case, a state of mind attainable by believers—that is, attainable Scripturally, and on good grounds. It is notorious that mankind are apt to fall into the grossest delusions on all subjects, but more particularly on those which are connected with their religious prospects. But the question is, Whether it is possible for sober-minded persons, who believe in Christ to the saving of the soul, to be assured in their own minds, on trustworthy evidence, that they are in a state of salvation?

Now, to this question, I think, the reply is, not only that some true believers may be assured of their own sincerity and consequent safety, but that, according to the Word of God, it appears evidently to be the duty of all believers, without exception, to endeavour to reach this high attainment. If any professed disciple of Jesus Christ tells me that he is fully assured of his being in a state of grace and salvation, am I entitled to receive his declaration with incredulity, and to say to him, “You must be deceiving yourself; such confidence is in its very nature unscriptural and

presumptuous"? No. He may, it is true, be deceiving himself. Such confidence as his may, in this particular instance, be unwarranted; but at least it is not in its own nature unscriptural and presumptuous. On the contrary, he but professes to have attained a grace which is in Scripture declared to be attainable by any believer, and which it is declared to be the duty of every believer to seek after with the utmost diligence. Paul the Apostle was certainly no fanatic. He was accustomed to "speak forth the words of truth and soberness;" yet he tells us that he himself had attained to an assurance of grace and salvation. "I know," he said, "whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."* And to the same purpose, in that noble passage, also in 2d Timothy, like the other, written probably but a few weeks, or perhaps only a few days or hours, before the sword of the Roman executioner clave for him the way to his longed-for rest: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."† Now, the assurance which had thus been reached by the

* 2 Tim. i. 12.

† 2 Tim. iv. 6-8.

Apostle of the Gentiles, far from having been a privilege peculiar to him, is, I repeat, but a grace which the humblest Christian is in Scripture taught to aspire to, and may hope to attain. "We desire," Paul himself says to the Hebrews, "that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."* In like manner the Apostle Peter exhorts all "that had obtained like precious faith" with himself to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure."†

It certainly becomes every Christian, without exception, to give such diligence to make his own

* *Hep. vi. 11.*

† *2 Pet. i. 1-10.* That it is the duty of every believer to aspire to an assurance of grace, is strongly maintained even by so sober-minded and judicious a writer as Hooker (all whose expressions in referring to this subject I do not adopt). He says: "It behoveth you greatly every man to examine his own estate, and try whether you be bond or free, children or no children. . . . Unto you, because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, to the end ye might know that Christ hath built you upon a rock immovable; that He hath registered your names in the book of life; that He hath bound himself in a sure and everlasting covenant to be your God; . . . that He hath suffered as much, groaned as oft, prayed as heartily, for you as for Peter: 'O Father, keep them in Thy name!' 'O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee; and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. I have declared Thy name unto them, and will declare it, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them!' The Lord of His infinite mercy give us hearts plentifully fraught with the treasure of this blessed assurance of faith unto the end."—*Hooker's Works*, vol. ii. p. 766-768.

calling and election sure. Paul prayed for the disciples in Rome that "the God of hope might fill them with all joy and peace in believing, that they might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."* That is, he prayed that they might have an assurance of grace and salvation; and we cannot wonder that he should so pray for those in whose spiritual welfare he was interested, or that he should, as we find he and other Apostles did, exhort all believers to pray and labour themselves for so great a boon. "Blessed," says the Psalmist, "is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."† But he must be still more blessed who himself knows that he is forgiven and sanctified.‡ To believe that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,"§ and that "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him,"|| is a precious

* Rom. xv. 13.

† Ps. xxxii. 1, 2.

‡ "The most godly men have need to renew this suit, that, together with pardon, they may obtain the comfortable persuasion and assurance of it. . . . Forgiveness itself is indeed the main, and is often granted where the other, the assurance of it, is withheld for a time; but there is no question that we may—yea, that we ought—to desire it and seek after it. He is blessed that is pardoned, though as yet he know it not; yet, doubtless, it abates much of his happiness for the time that he does not know it."—Leighton's Exposition of the Lord's Prayer, Select Works, p. 350.

§ 1 John i. 7.

|| Heb. vii. 25.

faith; but that faith is yet more to be prized which can go a step further, and say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, *who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*"* And if we envy the man over whose repentance there is already "joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God,"† surely he is still more enviable who has learned to rejoice in it himself with a joy hardly inferior to theirs—"a joy unspeakable and full of glory."‡ Then we must consider, on the other hand, that to one alive to the evil of sin and the worth of the soul, the misery of any doubt as to his own state before God cannot fail to be almost insupportable, while the consequences of any mistake may be irretrievable. On the whole, therefore, it must be accounted one of the most obvious duties of every believer to spare no pains for the attainment of an assurance of grace and salvation.

But, in the next place, we come to the question, Whether this assurance is not only thus possible and desirable, but also *indispensable*? A conviction of our own safety is, as we have found, sometimes held to be absolutely necessary to salvation, or rather to be the very condition of salvation—not only a blessing attainable and desirable, and which ought to be diligently sought, but the very grace by which a man is saved, and without which

* Gal. ii. 20.

† Luke xv. 10.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 8.

he must be held to be yet in his sins. It is maintained that, in the words of the Palatine Catechism, "true faith" is "an assured confidence . . . by which I rest upon God, assuredly holding that by God's mercy and on account of Christ's merits, not only to others but to me also, *the remission of sins, eternal righteousness, and life ARE GIVEN.*"* The same view is not unfrequently stated in still broader terms. Now, is it indeed the doctrine of Scripture that assurance of salvation is thus essential to, and indeed identical with, a true faith in Christ?

In answer to this question, which is certainly one of great and general interest, I will only say that I hold, with the Westminster Confession, that, according to Scripture, an infallible assurance of grace and salvation "doth not belong to the essence of saving faith;" and that, therefore, though attainable and desirable—indeed, a blessing to be diligently sought after—such an assurance is not absolutely indispensable. Instead of being of the essence of saving faith, it is (as we have already found) one of its fruits—a high attainment, "necessary," to use the words of Boston,

* "Quid est fides? Est non tantum notitia qua firmiter assentior omnibus, quæ Deus nobis in verbo suo patefecit, sed etiam certa fiducia, a Spiritu Sancto, per Evangelium in corde meo accensa, qua in Deo acquiesco, certò statuens, non solum aliis, sed mihi quoque remissionem peccatorum, eternam justitiam et vitam, donatam esse, idque gratis ex Dei misericordia propter unius Christi

“to the wellbeing rather than to the being of a Christian.” *

I cannot hope to express the views which appear to me to be those of Scripture as to this point, more clearly than by quoting the following passage from the writings of Andrew Fuller: “Some have maintained that faith in Christ consists in a persuasion of our interest in Christ, and in all the benefits and blessings of His mediation. . . . It is common for such persons to call those fears which occupy the minds of Christians, lest they should miss of salvation at last, by the name of unbelief; and to reprove them for being guilty of this God-dishonouring sin, exhorting them to be strong in faith, like Abraham, giving glory to God: when all that is meant is, that they should without doubt believe the goodness of their state. . . . I have no objection to allowing that true faith hath in it the nature of appropriation, if by this term be meant an application of the truths believed to our own particular cases. . . . By saving faith we undoubtedly embrace Christ *for ourselves* in the same sense as Jacob embraced Jehovah as *his* God (Gen. xxviii. 21); that is, to a rejecting of every idol that stands in competition with Him. Christ is all-sufficient, and suited to

meritum.”—*Catechesis Religionis Christianæ, quæ in Ecclesiis et Scholis Palatinatus . . . tradebatur*, p. 8.

* Boston’s Body of Divinity, vol. iii. p. 225.

save *us* as well as others ; and it is for the forgiveness of *our* sins that we put our trust in Him. But this is very different from a persuasion of our being in a state of salvation. . . . Nothing can be an object of faith except what God has revealed in His Word ; but the interest that any individual has in Christ and the blessings of the Gospel more than another, is not revealed. God has nowhere declared, concerning any one of us as individuals, that we shall be saved ; all that He has revealed on this subject respects us as *characters*. He has abundantly promised that all who *believe in Him, love Him, and obey Him*, shall be saved ; and a persuasion that, if we sustain these characters, we shall be saved, is doubtless an exercise of faith ; but whether we do or not is an object not of faith but of consciousness. . . . To believe ourselves in a state of salvation (however desirable when grounded on evidence) is far inferior in its object to saving faith. The grand object on which faith fixes is the glory of Christ, and not the happy condition we are in, as interested in Him. . . . If we be concerned only for our own security our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins.” *

With regard, indeed, to confidence in our own security being *not indispensable*, the language of the prophet is of itself decisive : “ Who is among

* Fuller’s *Gospel Worthy of all Acceptance*, part I.

you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? *Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.** Here is a description of faith in God without an infallible personal assurance of grace and salvation. And what is the message which the prophet conveys to such persons? Does he tell them to conclude that they are reprobate? Inasmuch as they "walk in darkness and have no light," does he place them beyond the pale of salvation? No; but he bids them, if they distrust themselves, only the more to put their hope in God. He says, "Let them trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God!"—a lesson also most plainly taught in the 77th Psalm, where the Psalmist, after telling us that he had been so troubled that he even began to doubt whether the Lord had not "forgotten to be gracious," and His mercy was not "clean gone for ever," adds, "And I said, This is *my infirmity*, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."†

And, for my own part, I rejoice to be able to believe that we may thus trust in God, and stay upon God, our Saviour, even when we lose all confidence in ourselves; and that, however important such a grace may be for our comfort and

* Isaiah l. 10.

† Ps. lxxvii. 10.

enjoyment, our *safety*, at least, does not depend on our having at all times or at any time an assurance of salvation. It is a melancholy but instructive fact, that those persons are often the most ready to say, "Peace, peace," who have no peace.* Indeed the very ignorance and carelessness and hardness of heart which characterise the ungodly, render them not only callous and presumptuous, but even sometimes hopeful. And so, on the other hand, some of the very graces of the true people of God—as, for example, their profound conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, their sense of the unspeakable value of salvation, and the earnestness of their desires for spiritual life—have a tendency to make them scrupulous, over-anxious, and self-distrustful ; so that, even in regard to spiritual things, they are more in trouble than other men. Especially is this often seen as the time approaches when the great question that, throughout life, has occupied so much of their attention, and stirred their profoundest emotions, is to be finally decided—the time when they must die, and actually appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, to hear from His lips their eternal award ; a time, too, when weakness of body predisposes the mind in an unusual degree to anxious thoughts. The consequence is, that while of the wicked man it is said, "There

* Jer. vi. 14.

are no bands in his death,"* the deathbed of him who seems to have lived only for Christ is not unfrequently destitute of spiritual comfort, and his last moments may even be disturbed by a despondency amounting almost to despair of salvation. I rejoice to be enabled to believe that, like the many other afflictions of the righteous, this great trial is no certain disproof, as the absence of it is no certain proof,† of the favour of God, who may in their last hours, as at other times, chasten those whom He most loves; and that of the men of faith and prayer and holy lives who have passed away from this world—as some such men have done—in even more anguish of mind than of body, we may, Scripturally, indulge the hope that, on entering instantly into eternity, they have been

* Ps. lxxiii. 4.

† "It must needs be very unreasonable," says President Edwards, "to determine that persons are hypocrites, because they seem to be out of doubt respecting their own salvation. On the other hand, it is no sufficient reason to determine that men are saints, and their affections gracious, because they are attended with confidence that their state is good. Nothing can certainly be argued from their confidence, how great and strong soever it be. A man may boldly call God his Father, and commonly speak in the most bold, familiar, and appropriating language in prayer; . . . he may use the most confident expressions before men about the goodness of his state,—such as, 'I know certainly that God is my Father'—'I know I shall go to heaven as well as if I were there,' he may seem to have done for ever with any inquiry or examination into his state, as a thing sufficiently known and out of doubt; yet such things are no signs at all that it is indeed what he is confident it is."—*Religious Affections*, part II. sec. xi.

received by Him who, when "our hearts condemn us," "is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things,"* with the welcome, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."†

"Two men," said our Lord, "went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."‡

* 1 John iii. 20.

† Mat. xxv. 21. "Some," says Thomas Boston, "die triumphantly in a full assurance of faith. . . . Others . . . firmly believe, though they are not filled with joy in believing. . . . But the dying day of some saints may be like that day mentioned in Zech. xiv. 7, 'not day, nor night.' They may die under great doubts and fears. . . . Nevertheless the state of the saints in their death is always in itself hopeful. The presumptuous hopes of the ungodly cannot make *their* state hopeful; neither can the hopelessness of a saint make his state hopeless: for God judgeth according to the truth of the thing, not according to men's opinions about it."—Fourfold State, iv. sec. 2.

‡ Luke xviii. 10-14. It is not, of course, meant, by the intro-

In the last place, What are the means by which the believer attains to an assurance of grace and salvation? It has been found that, according to Scripture, assurance is not indispensable to eternal life, but if not absolutely indispensable, is attainable and desirable, and indeed that it is one of those "best gifts" which we are exhorted to "covet earnestly." "A true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties before he is a partaker of it: yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in

duction of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, to be implied that all persons who claim an assurance of grace are Pharisees. The contrary opinion has already been abundantly shown to be Scriptural. Yet there can be no doubt that this parable, spoken to "certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others," is applicable not only for the encouragement of some who lament the want of, but for the reproof of some who profess to have attained, a confident belief in their own safety. It is so applied by Dr Dwight, in the following passage, which is important, as expressing the deliberate opinion of a man of so much learning, personal piety, and experience: "No evidence of our sanctification is furnished by our own confidence. . . . All enthusiasts usually confide with undoubting assurance in the reality of their own religion; and generally pity and often despise men of a humbler and a better spirit, because they do not enjoy such peculiar discoveries, such delightful exercises of devotion, such bright hopes and heavenly anticipations of future glory, as themselves. The Pharisee boldly said, 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, or even as this publican.' Yet he was a worse man than the publican. . . . In ordinary cases, *I entertain a better opinion of the modest, doubting, fearful professor, than of the bold and assured one.*"—Dwight's Theology, vol. iv. p. 70.

the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience.”*

What, then, are the means of arriving at an assurance of grace and salvation?

Before replying to this question, let me warn the reader against being disappointed and offended if he find the means prescribed in the Word of God for the obtaining of this blessing different from what he may himself have anticipated, and especially if they appear to him more simple and ordinary than seems to him to befit the nature of the case. When Naaman the Syrian, who had come to Elisha the prophet to be healed of his leprosy, was directed by Elisha to go and wash seven times in Jordan and he would be clean, he “was wroth,” we are told, “and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?”

* Confession of Faith agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, chap. xviii. sec. 3.

So he turned, and went away in a rage."* He expected that the means of his recovery would, like the recovery itself, be supernatural; and when told only to wash in Jordan seven times, he was so disappointed that he turned his horses' heads from the door of the prophet, and was about to abandon the object of his journey. Are not all of us sometimes tempted to reject the means of grace provided in the Gospel for a similar reason —that is, because these do not come up to our own preconceived ideas as to what is most worthy of God, and especially because they are more simple and less extraordinary than we had anticipated? Let us take warning and example by the case of Naaman. "And his servants came near," it is added, "and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."†

Now, if it be asked, What are the means of attaining to an infallible assurance of grace and salvation? the answer of Scripture is everywhere substantially the same. An assurance of grace and salvation, though a gift of the Holy Spirit, is,

* 2 Kings v. 11, 12.

† 2 Kings v. 13, 14.

in itself, simply a well-founded persuasion that we are truly the disciples of Christ, and therefore the heirs of the promises. And the means by which we ascertain our discipleship must be also the means of reaching the grace of assurance—namely, a holy life. So, accordingly, we find it to be, as especially stated in the first chapter of 2d Peter, where the Apostle, while exhorting believers generally “to give diligence to make their calling and election sure,” tells them that the fruits of faith are also its evidence; and that it is by adding to their faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity—that it is by cultivating these graces, and such graces as these, so as not to be “unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that they may be “made sure” that “they shall never fall,” and that “an entrance shall be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

To this view I am aware that two objections may be, if not alleged or even acknowledged, yet secretly felt. One of these has just been noticed. The commonness and simplicity of such means of attaining assurance may disappoint many persons who have been led to anticipate something more mysterious and extraordinary in the communica-

* 2 Pet. i. 11.

tion of knowledge so precious ; expecting, perhaps, voices from heaven, visions, and other supernatural modes of revelation,* and especially expecting, as numbers are known to do, that the means should be such as to lead, not to a gradual and slowly-growing conviction, but to a sudden and instantaneous change from the depths of despair to "joy and peace in believing."† This objection has been already met. God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. But the strongest ground of objection to the method of reaching assurance by means of a holy life remains to be disclosed—namely, its difficulty, and the secret but no less real disinclination of the

* Edwards (T.), speaking of the times of the Commonwealth, says, "'Tis ordinary for Christians now in these days with Paul to be rapt up to the third heavens, and to hear words unutterable, and they cannot well have assurance of being Christians that have not found and had experience of this."—*Gangræna*, p. 28. Among other cognate errors of his day, as of ours, was, of course, this : "That sanctification is not an evidence of justification, and all notes and signs of a Christian estate are legall and unlawfull."—*Ibid.* p. 20. As to visions, &c., see also Lavington's *Enthus.* of Methodists and Papists, p. 40-42, and p. 228-235.

† "1. When a man has living faith, then is he justified. 2. This is always given in a moment. 3. And in that moment he has peace with God. 4. Which he cannot have without knowing it."—Peter Böhler, *apud* Wesley's *Journals*, p. 47. "The leading of the Spirit is different in different souls. His *more usual method is, I believe, to give in one and the same moment the forgiveness of sins and a full assurance of that forgiveness.*"—Michael Linner of Hernalshut, *ibid.* p. 54. For parallel pretensions in the lives of Roman Catholic saints, see Lavington, p. 28-30.

corrupt heart of man to its terms. If possible, we would have the joys of salvation without the trials and difficulties of the Christian life—without, in short, needing to wait at all, or labour at all, or suffer at all. Our unconfessed, perhaps, but real ambition is, to seize the crown without having borne the cross. We desire “the glory, and honour, and immortality” of the people of God, but are unwilling to submit to that “patient continuance in well-doing,” without which peace and joy, whether here or hereafter, are not by them secured.

But whatever our own vain wishes and ignorant anticipations, such means as have now been stated are the means by which, according to Scripture,*

* See Edwards on the Religious Affections, *passim*, especially part iii. sec. 14. His position is, that “Christian practice is the chief of all the evidences of a saving sincerity in religion.” In showing that “this evidence is above all others insisted on in Scripture,” Edwards, not without reason, complains of the little deference paid to the authority of Scripture by too many writers on this important question: “A common acquaintance with the Scripture, together with a little attention and observation, will be sufficient to show to any one that this [Christian practice] is ten times more insisted on as a note of true piety throughout the Scripture, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Revelation, than anything else. And in the New Testament, where Christ and His Apostles do expressly and of declared purpose lay down signs of true godliness, this is almost wholly insisted on. . . . Which is an invincible argument that it is the chief of all the evidences of godliness; *unless we suppose that Christ and His Apostles did not know how to choose signs so well as we could have done for them.* But if we make the word of Christ our rule, then,

assurance of grace must be sought and found. (I speak, however, of *ordinary* means ; because that this, as every spiritual attainment, may sometimes be reached through special and exceptional grace, is of course implied.) St John says expressly, "Hereby we do know that we know Jesus Christ, if we keep His commandments."* It was by such means that even so highly privileged a man as Paul himself—a man not without visions and revelations from the Lord, and whose very conversion had been accompanied by signs and miracles—in his own case obtained assurance. His language on the subject is decisive and unmistakable. Even in his spiritual experience, certainly, there were times when as "without were fightings," so "within were fears ;" times when he even feared "lest he himself should be a castaway."† But he had attained to a conviction of his own sincerity and security. By what means? Not by visions and revelations ; not by voices from heaven ; not instantaneously and suddenly ; but by the evid-

undoubtedly, those marks which Christ and His Apostles chiefly lay down, that we might try ourselves by them, those same marks we ought especially to receive, and chiefly to use in the trial of ourselves. . . . To insist much on those things on which the Scripture insists little, and to insist very little on those things on which the Scripture insists much, is a dangerous thing, because it is going out of God's way, and is to judge ourselves and guide others in an unscriptural manner."—Treatise concerning Religious Affections, p. 464-466.

* 1 John ii. 3.

† 2 Cor. vii. 5 ; 1 Cor. ix. 27.

ence of a holy life—a life spent (through God's grace) in the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope. In the first chapter of 2d Corinthians we find Paul saying that God had "sealed" him—given him "the earnest of the Spirit in his heart;" and in the same passage he explains what was the ground of all his confidence. "Our rejoicing," he says, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."*

And if by such means we alone can, let us rejoice that by such means we may, with God's blessing, "assure our hearts before Him."† It may not come to-day, nor to-morrow, nor for many years. In the nature of the case, time, and varied opportunities of experience, are indispensable. But a true assurance of grace—that blessed state of mind in which a man can say of Jesus Christ, "My beloved is mine, and I am His"—is thus attainable. Hold fast your faith, and persevere in all Christian duties patiently unto the end; seeking for these purposes continually the grace which is never sought in vain, and which will be found to be sufficient for you; and I do not say you will necessarily and inevitably attain, but you may reasonably hope to attain in God's good time, the enviable assurance

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† 1 John. iii. 19.

that your salvation has been secured. If when you look back on your past life—not, of course, in any spirit of self-righteousness *—you find that you have overcome temptation, obtained the mastery over the flesh, laid aside besetting sins, and lived a life of faith and holy obedience, you may hope to be enabled to draw the inevitable inference—namely, that you have been subjects of the grace of God, and are therefore heirs of His glory. And if by any means this hope, this assurance, should be always withheld from you, as, notwithstanding such a life of faith in the Son of God, it may in this world always be withheld, you will at all events have what is even more to be desired. In that case, whether you know it or not, whether you can rejoice in it or not, you will have salvation itself. “He that doeth these things” can

* See as to this point, also, the work of President Edwards, referred to above, and which may be most earnestly commended throughout to the careful perusal of any man whose mind is unsettled on the subject of assurance. It is usual enough at all times to charge those who appeal to a holy life as an evidence of faith with unevangelical doctrine, but wholly without reason. “In what has been said of the importance of holy practice as the main sign of sincerity, there is nothing legal; nothing derogatory to the freedom and sovereignty of Gospel grace; nothing in the least clashing with the Gospel doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the works of the law; nothing in the least tending to lessen the glory of the Mediator, and our dependence on His righteousness.”—Edwards on the Religious Affections, p. 496. That the truth in question may be abused is certain. What truth may not by some men be wrested to their own destruction?

“never fall.” By the same grace which thus sanctifies you, you will assuredly be glorified. In truth, in that case, you already “have everlasting life,” and “are passed from death unto life.”* And “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus your Lord.”†

* John vi. 47; John v. 24.

† Rom. viii. 38.



CHAPTER IX.

OF FAITH MADE PERFECT.

“ Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on !
The night is dark, and I am far from home ;
 Lead Thou me on !
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene,—one step enough for me.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone.”

—*Lyra Apostolica.*

CHAPTER IX.

OF FAITH MADE PERFECT.

THE faith of the Christian is, like all his other graces, found in a state of perfect maturity and complete development, not on earth, but in heaven.

This truth is one of very great importance to those who feel most deeply how far, at best, as long as they are in the world, their faith falls short of that vigour and constancy which they themselves desire, inasmuch as it holds out to them a reasonable hope of the eventual realisation of their fondest aspirations.

It is also, however, very important for another reason. Claims appear to be sometimes made to the actual possession, or hopes are indulged as to the possible attainment, in this life, of degrees of faith, which are, in fact, incompatible with the condition of even the best men in their present state of imperfect sanctification; and which, to

prevent presumption on the one hand, and discouragement and disappointment on the other, cannot be too often shown to be unscriptural and baseless. We have found that stronger and more comprehensive faith, as well as faith more free from error, than has yet been attained by many persons who are, notwithstanding, true believers, *is* attainable with God's blessing even in this life. We have also seen that the assurance of grace and salvation is attainable in this life. Is it, however, the case, that in these or other respects faith may be reached in this life, *in a state of absolute perfection*, and unaccompanied by those manifold defects and imperfections which continue to characterise all the other graces of even the best men? I do not know that many persons would answer this question in the affirmative, when proposed to them in so many words; but a vague, undefined, yet not less mischievous opinion to this effect seems to prevail notwithstanding; and practically, many believers do appear to expect to reach, sooner or later, even in the present life, a kind of faith in Christ which cannot be described otherwise than as a faith absolutely perfect.* To what

* The Reformers, whatever unguarded language they may have used as to the necessity for a "certain" faith, were careful to disclaim holding that faith could attain to perfection in this life. Thus Calvin asserts that in this life the believer finds within himself two principles as regards faith, no less than other points of Christian duty, adding, "Quæ variatio ex fidei imperfectione contingit;

presumption on the part of some, and on the part of others to what disquietude and discouragement, such an expectation must give rise, need not be said.

That faith should ever be found in this world in a state of full maturity and perfection, is a position against which there exists the antecedent improbability that it is at variance with an otherwise uniform law of Divine Providence. It would require very strong reasons to prove that sanctified persons can in this life believe perfectly, for they can certainly do nothing else perfectly. It is true that the perfectibility of the saints in the present life is a tenet which, with other extravagances, has not wanted supporters in every age of the Church.* And if we choose to take particular

quando nunquam tam bene in præsentis vita cursu nobiscum agitur ut omni diffidentia morbo curati, fide toti repleamur et occupemur." And again, "Quum [Apostolus] enim ex parte nos cognoscere, et ex parte prophetare, videreque in ænigmate per speculum tradit, quam tenuis in præsenti vita illius bene divinae sapientiæ portiuncula nobis detur, indicat. Etsi enim non simpliciter indicant verba illa imperfectam esse fidem quantis per gemimus sub carnis onere, sed quod necesse est nobis assiduè, discendo exerceri, ex imperfectione nostra contingere; innuit tamen modulo nostro et angustiis quod immensum est non posse comprehendendi. *Atque hoc Paulus de tota Ecclesia predicit; cuique autem nostrum sua ruditas obstaculum et remora est, ne tam prope accedat quam optandum esset.*"—*Institutio, lib. III. cap. ii. sec. 18, 20.*

* It was one of the tenets of the Pelagian heresy, but has not been confined to Pelagianism. See, for instance, abundant evidence in Wesley's Journals. Claims to Christian perfection appear

texts of Scripture without relation to the context or the general scope of the inspired volume, and attach to every expression in them an exaggerated weight and force, we shall be at no loss to find apparent authority for asserting that Christian perfection *in all things* is attainable even in the life which now is.* Such a doctrine, however, will not bear for a moment an appeal to Scripture, rightly understood. How contrary it is to experience need hardly be said. The Scriptural view has been well stated by Augustin: "The goal to which all the pious ought to aspire is to appear in the presence of God without spot or blemish;

(in Wesley) to be very commonly associated with extreme views on the subject of personal assurance. Thus, in the second Journal (14th May 1738): "When Böhler . . . affirmed of true faith in Christ, that it had those two fruits inseparably attending it, dominion over sin and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness, I was quite amazed, and looked upon it as a new Gospel. . . . The next day, he [Böhler] came with three others, all of whom testified of their own personal experience that a true, living faith in Christ is inseparable from a sense of pardon from all past, *and freedom from all present sins*. . . . I was now thoroughly convinced." Lavington does not fail to point out a parallel to these views of some of the Moravians and Methodists in the Catholic legends: "St Francis transgressed not one jot or tittle of the Gospel; Adam did not sin in him, he being so perfect. . . . Nor did Adam sin in St Bonaventure. The Fraticelli, a branch of the Franciscans, stiffly maintained the doctrine of perfection, asserting that a man may in this life attain to so great perfection as to live without sin."—Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared, p. 32.

* *E.g.* Mat. v. 48; 1 Pet. iii. 6.

but as the course of the present life is at best nothing more than progress, we shall never reach the goal until we have laid aside the body of sin, and been completely united to the Lord."* To the same effect Calvin : " I insist not that the life of the Christian shall breathe nothing but the perfect Gospel, though this is to be desired, and ought to be attempted. I insist not so strictly on evangelical perfection as to refuse to acknowledge as a Christian any man who has not attained it. What then ? Let us set this before our eye as the end at which we ought constantly to aim. Let it be regarded as the goal to which we are to run.

. . . . How little soever the success may correspond with our wish, our labour is not lost when to-day is better than yesterday, provided with true singleness of mind we keep our aim, and aspire to the goal, not speaking flattering things to ourselves, nor indulging our vices, but making it our constant endeavour to become better, until we attain to goodness itself. If during the whole course of our life we seek and follow, we shall at length attain it : when, relieved from the infirmity of flesh, we are admitted to full fellowship with God."†

The *knowledge*, for instance, which is attainable in this life—that is, even the knowledge of God

* Quoted by Calvin, *Instit. lib. III. cap. xvii. sec. 15.*

† *Instit. lib. III. cap. vi. sec. 1.*

and spiritual things, a grace intimately, indeed inseparably, associated with that of faith itself—is not perfect. It is doubtless our duty to aspire after the highest degrees of knowledge; and doubtless such degrees of it are, in fact, attainable as will serve all practical purposes: so that even in this life we may certainly be made “wise unto salvation.”* Still our knowledge is always, while we are in the flesh, confessedly, and according to Scripture itself, incomplete.† If we do not grope in darkness, neither do we walk in the sunshine. We are, in fact, in an intermediate state; in the twilight; in light which is neither day nor night, but partakes of the nature of both. We know much, but we are also very ignorant—perhaps not less ignorant than knowing, perhaps more ignorant: how ignorant indeed—ignorant of how many truths, and what their nature and importance—it is impossible to determine; for we do not, of course, even know how much there is to be known. One thing, however, is certain—namely, that we do not know the whole. Bishop Butler speaks with just contempt of the inconceivable folly of unbelievers who reason against religion, “as if the whole case were before them.”‡ Now, in this life the whole case is not before any of us.

The holiness, again, which is attainable in this

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

† 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

‡ Analogy, part II. chap. iii. sec. 3, note.

life is, in like manner, imperfect, as every man feels and knows. For although a perfect law has been given us, and a perfect example set before us, even the example of Christ himself, that we may ever aim after nothing short of complete obedience to the will of God, and entire conformity to His image, and although it is our part constantly to endeavour to "cleanse ourselves," in the words of the Apostle, "from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness* in the fear of the Lord,"* yet, in this life, the holiest man that ever lived must acknowledge that sinmingles with his holiest services, and that he has reason to the last to continue to pray from day to day for the forgiveness of sins. Accordingly, we are told in Scripture "that there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not,"† and that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."‡

And so, again, it is with our joy and peace. The Scriptures exhort all Christians to "rejoice in the Lord alway,"§ and tell them of "a joy unspeakable and full of glory,"|| and "a peace which passeth all understanding,"¶ to which it is their duty to aspire. But who attains to these things perfectly in the present life?

Imperfection, then, characterises the position of

* 2 Cor. vii. 1.

† Eccl. vii. 20.

‡ 1 John i. 8.

§ Philip. iv. 4.

|| 1 Pet. i. 8.

¶ Phil. iv. 7.

believers upon the whole. What reason have we for making in this respect a difference between faith and other graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit? What authority can be given to justify us in constituting faith an exception to what is otherwise a universal law? It has already been amply shown that even in this life very high degrees of faith are attainable, and ought to be aimed after. We are exhorted to "believe *with all our heart*," and to draw near to God "with a true heart *in full assurance of faith*;"* and if these expressions, like those in which we are required to be "holy as God is holy," and "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect," must be taken with some abatement, as indicating rather the aim than the actual attainment of believers, still it is clear, from the use of such language, and from Scripture throughout, that very high degrees of faith ought to be sought, and may be found, even in the life that now is. But what authority is there for imagining that perfect faith can any more be expected on earth than perfect knowledge, or perfect holiness, or perfect happiness?

If not in this life, however, yet in the life to come, the faith of those who truly believe in Christ unto salvation will be at length made perfect. The heavenly state may be described as the completion of the work of the earthly, the

* Acts viii. 37; Heb. x. 22.

fulfilment of its promise, the accomplishment of its hopes and aspirations, the attainment of its aims, and the consummation of its joys. And, like every other plant which our heavenly Father plants in the hearts of His elect, faith, though not here, yet in heaven, will doubtless reach its full growth.

Strangely enough, it is sometimes supposed to be the doctrine of Scripture, that, far from being alone perfected in heaven, faith is a grace of the Holy Spirit which in heaven has no place whatever. This hypothesis might naturally occur to persons holding the narrow view of faith that it consists in a mere assent of the intellect to the truth of Christianity. It is more difficult to understand in what way it has come to be so generally received by orthodox divines. It is probably one of the many traditions of the Roman Catholic Church which still hold their place even in the Reformed Churches, simply because the questions to which they relate have escaped attention. Romanism could not fail to leave traces of its opinions on Christian doctrine; it has left many such traces which even three centuries and a-half have failed to efface entirely; and this is probably one of them. The view in question is, at all events, altogether without warrant in Holy Scripture. It is true that the circumstances in which the believer is destined to find himself in

another world will, in many respects, differ from his circumstances on earth ; and there must be a consequent cessation, not of the obligation only, but even of the opportunity of his continuing hereafter to exercise some of the religious graces which are here required of him. Thus death will be unknown in heaven, and sorrow, and crying, and pain. There will be no temptations or trials of any kind—no ignorance, no weakness, or sin. Accordingly, none of the graces which depend for their obligation and the opportunity of their exercise on these conditions of the earthly state—as, for instance, patience, resignation, watchfulness, contrition—can have any place found for them in the future state of existence. For a like reason, the observance of forms, and times, and places of public worship, social and family duties, and many other of the most important details of religious life, as it exists on earth, will no longer be either obligatory or possible. Some things, therefore, even some good things, which are found on earth, will be wanting in heaven. But is Christian faith one of these things ? The only texts which are ever brought forward to support the popular and current opinion on this question would, even if their true meaning were less doubtful than it is,* afford a wholly insufficient basis

* These texts are, 2 Cor. v. 7, διὰ πίστεως γὰρ περιπατοῦμεν, οὐ διὰ εἰδούσας—which is evidently beside the purpose ; and 1 Cor. xiii.

for so extraordinary a hypothesis, as that the time can never arrive, either in this world or in the next, when faith in Christ will be obsolete or out of date.

Of course the faith of saints in heaven cannot have all the same characteristics as the faith of saints on earth.* Spiritual life must, in all re-

13, *vuvl δὲ μένει πίστις, ἀληθινή, τὰ τρία ταῦτα*. As to the latter passage, see Alford (Greek Testament, *in. loc.*), who shows the meaning to be, “Some gifts shall pass away, but these three great graces shall remain for ever—faith, hope, and love.” He gives the following reasons for this exposition:—“(1) *vuvl δέ* is not ‘but *now*,’ *i.e.*, in this present state, as opposed to what has just been said, v. 12, but ‘*rebus sic stantibus*,’ ‘*quae cum ita sint*,’—and the inference from it just the contrary of that implied in the other [the usual] rendering—viz., that *since tongues, prophesying, knowledge, will all pass away*, we have left *but these three*. (2) From the position of *μένει*, it has a strong *emphasis*, and carries the weight of the clause, as opposed to the previously mentioned things which *καταργηθήσεται*. (3) From *τὰ τρία ταῦτα*, a pre-eminence is obviously pointed out for faith, hope, and love, distinct from aught which has gone before.”

* No attempt is here made to speculate upon the precise nature of this change. Baxter’s hypothesis can hardly be accepted as satisfactory. He says: “There is contained in this rest a cessation . . . not of all action, but of that which hath the nature of a means, and implies the absence of the end. . . . And so faith may be said to cease: not all faith, for how shall we know all things past which we saw not, but by believing? How shall we know the last judgment, the resurrection of the body, beforehand, but by believing? How shall we know the life everlasting, the eternity of the joys we possess, but by believing? All that faith, which as a means referred to the chief end, shall cease.”—Saint’s Rest, part I. chap. iv. sec. 2. Alford’s explanation is as follows: “How can faith abide—faith which is the evidence of things *not seen*—where all things once believed are seen? In the

spects, undergo stupendous, and to us, as yet, inconceivable changes, "when that which is perfect is come," and "that which is in part has been done away." The gifts and graces, habits of thought, affections, emotions, of that life, which survive the present state of things, will subsist under new conditions, and in forms correspondingly different. Man himself will be so transformed as to fit him for his future habitation. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."* But "we shall all be changed."† "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."‡ Nor is it only "our vile bodies" which shall be changed. All things will be changed. "Behold, I make all things new." In heaven nothing will find a place which is out of harmony with a heavenly state of existence. As far, therefore, as the faith of the Christian, in the forms in which we are familiar with that grace on earth, is unsuited for heaven, so far, doubtless, it will be changed. It will be changed as the believer him-

form of holy confidence and trust, faith will abide even there. The stay of all conscious created being, human or angelic, is dependence on God ; and where the faith which comes by hearing is out of the question, the faith which consists in trusting will be the only faith possible."—Greek Testament, Comment. on 1 Cor. xiii. 13. This, though doubtless true, does not exhaust the question.

* 1 Cor. xv. 50. † 1 Cor. xv. 51. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 53.

self is changed, even because it will, like him, be glorified and perfected. It will continue, however, to exist notwithstanding, even as he does, and will never perish any more than himself.

In order that we may be satisfied as to the certainty of the perpetuation in heaven of the grace of faith, it is enough that we should keep in mind the nature of the grace itself. Apart from its relation to local and temporary circumstances, and looking only to its essential principles, faith, as we have found, is trust in Jesus Christ for all things which are included in our salvation. Need anything more be said to prove that there will be faith in heaven as on earth? Shall we not, there and here, alike trust in Christ, who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,* whose we are whether living or dead,† and of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named? ‡ To suppose, indeed, that a time will ever come, either on earth or in heaven, when believers in Christ will cease to trust in their Saviour, would be to overthrow the very foundations of Christian doctrine.§

* Heb. xiii. 8. † Rom. xiv. 9. ‡ Eph. iii. 15.

§ Olshausen, in his annotation on Eph. iv. 11-13, after saying that the "perfecting of the saints," and their coming "in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man," refers both to the growth of the Church as a body and of its individual members, goes on to ask, "Is the Apostle thinking of the perfecting of individuals, and of the whole Church,

To those, then, who lament the weakness of their faith, while it must first of all be said that by God's help that faith is capable of much increase and growth even in the present life, it must also be said that for its arrival at perfect maturity they cannot do otherwise than await, and may confidently look forward to, the life which is to come.

as taking place here below, or in another life?" To this question he answers so far, as I think, in perfect accordance with Scripture, "St Paul did not look at these two states in contradistinction. The Church with him is one, formed not only by those who were living upon earth, but also by those who had died in the faith. . . . The complete manifestation of the *Church* in its perfect manhood will take place in the kingdom of God; but as St Paul exhorted his contemporaries, so may every Christian teacher in all ages exhort his, to press forward in their proportion toward the perfect manhood of Christ." But he then proceeds, as I understand him, to express an opinion, that while the *Church*, as a *Church*, is perfected in heaven, the individual members, as individuals, "do really attain to their goal, according to their calling and gifts, *here below*"—especially apparently as regards faith, which "hereafter will have passed into sight," and which, according to his interpretation of the passage, has no place in the perfected *Church* in heaven; for "the progress of the development which St Paul here speaks of, consists in this, that faith and knowledge are to become one; that is, that the faith with which the Christian life begins is to be elevated into real knowledge." The whole note will be found in Hare's *Mission of the Comforter*, vol. ii. p. 1021, and is approved by Mr Hare. It appears to be open to two objections: (1) that it ignores that quality of faith in Christ which I hold to be, according to Scripture, vital—namely, its fiducial character; and, (2) that it excludes the attainment, either on earth or in heaven, of perfection by the individual believer, making perfect manhood the end to be reached not by the individual member, but only by the collective body.

I do not attempt (let me repeat) to conjecture in what may consist the perfect faith, any more than the perfect blessedness otherwise, of glorified spirits. One thing, however, we may be assured of; namely, that in another world our faith will not be marred by the defects and infirmities of the flesh.

I have spoken of the incompleteness of our knowledge in this life. We shall certainly no longer have to complain of those obstacles to a perfect faith which arise from imperfect enlightenment. "It shall come to pass that at evening-time it shall be light." Many things are yet wholly unknown to us; many things we see but as it were from one side, and know only partially; many things are purposely left obscure to exercise our patience, and submission to God. Much of our present knowledge, indeed, is but a kind of ignorance. Our clearest views of divine truth are mixed with error. We go to the grave longing for kinds and degrees of spiritual illumination which we cannot reach, but which ever provoke, and yet evade, our pursuit; disputing with one another even about first principles; ignorant on those subjects on which we think we know the most; ignorant even of ourselves. We go to our graves exclaiming, if not with Pilate, "What is truth?" yet with Paul, "O! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out ! ” Thus we live, and after the farthest progress in the search after the knowledge of God our Saviour, thus we die. Not thus, however, shall we rise again. “ For that which we know not now we shall know hereafter.”* “ When Christ shall appear, . . . we shall see Him as He is.”† “ Now we see as through a glass darkly, but then face to face ; now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known.”‡

Nor shall we any longer suffer from that doubt and incertitude, even as to the evidence of religion, which so often disturbs us as long as we are in the flesh. It has been abundantly shown to be probable § that the want of irresistible evidence, and the presence of difficulties in the proof of religion, with the consequent liability even of believers themselves to unbelief, in some of its forms, is a part of the discipline by which in this world it is good for them to be exercised, and to which they are exposed by the express design and purpose of God. There will be no need, and no room, for such trials in heaven. Himself already an inheritor of the promises, the believer cannot any longer doubt, as in times of spiritual darkness he is often tempted to doubt now, whether Christ is indeed an all-sufficient Saviour, or whether

* John xiii. 7. † 1 John iii. 2. ‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

§ Analogy, part II. chap. vi.

there is any such thing as salvation, or any other life, or any God. But doubt will be excluded not more by a change of circumstances than by a change of character. Much of our unbelief arises less from the defect of evidence than from errors of disposition and affection on our part; from that love of sin, that enmity of the heart to God, which is only partially subdued in this life, but is destined, in that which is to come, to be completely and finally eradicated.

Nor will there be any more anxiety on the part of the believer as to his own interest in the great salvation. Even in this life, as we have seen, some disciples of Christ attain to a strong persuasion that they are already in a state of salvation, but others are all their days disquieted by apprehensions on that subject. It is, indeed, with not less fear than faith that they contemplate the greatest perfections of the Saviour, and read His most precious promises,—not less dread of themselves than confidence in Him. It is in vain to inquire whether such anxieties are reasonable or foolish. They exist. And they more or less mar the simplicity and the comfort of many a faithful Christian's faith in Christ. But they will, of course, have no place in the experience of those who have already actually entered upon the joy of their Lord.

But for the rest, “it doth not yet appear what

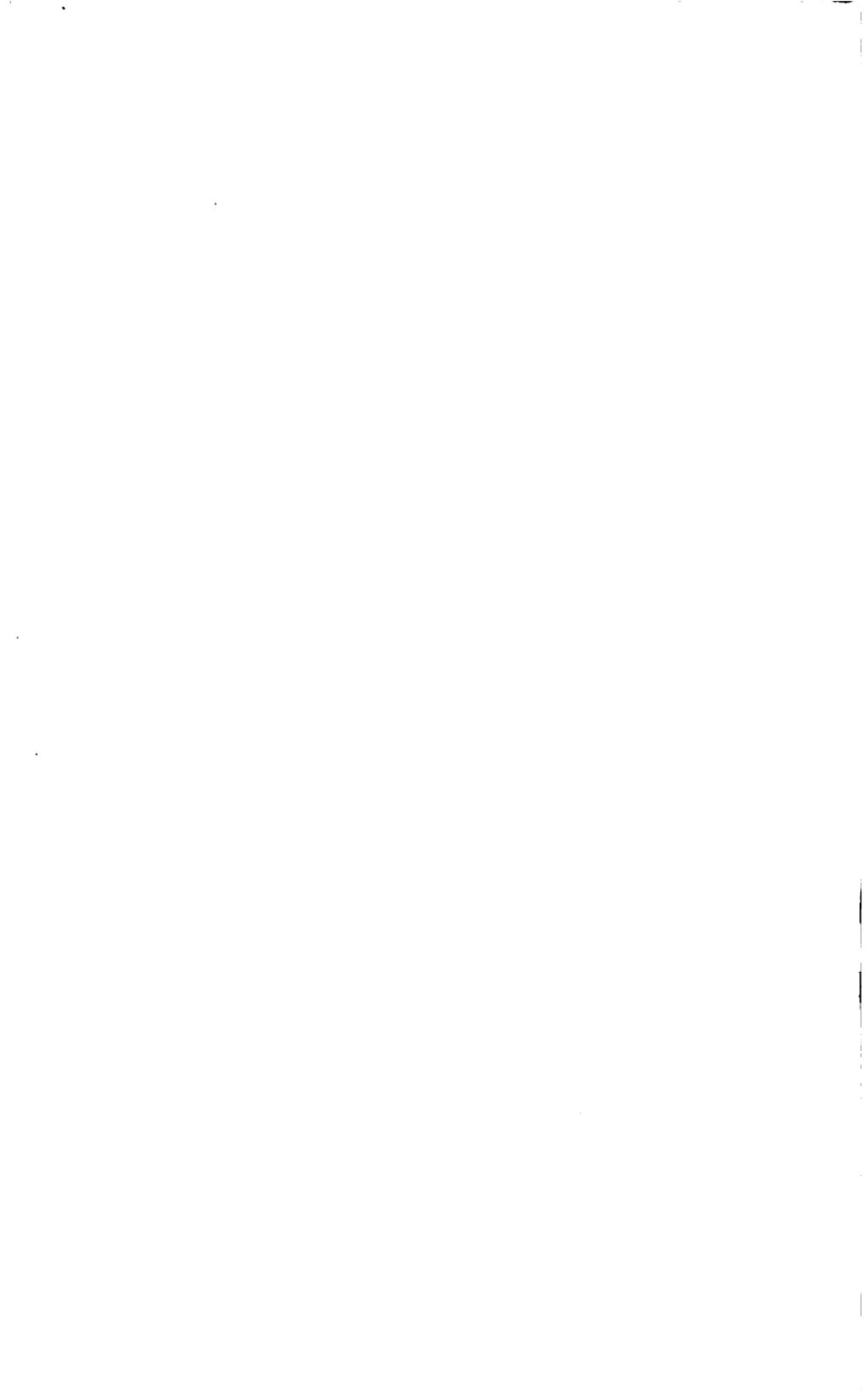
we shall be."* "For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."† "To him that overcometh," saith the Spirit, "will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it."‡

* 1 John iii. 2.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.

‡ Rev. ii. 17.

APPENDIX



A P P E N D I X.

THE RULE OF FAITH.

It has been assumed throughout the foregoing pages that the Holy Scriptures constitute the Rule of the Faith of the Christian: his only and sufficient warrant for believing in Christ, and the only and sufficient source of his knowledge of Christian doctrine. The question is one of the very greatest importance every way. It has also intimate relations to some of the topics which are considered in the present work. It is, of course, impossible to go into it here in any detail. With regard, indeed, to all collateral questions, I shall not allude to these at all; nor shall I attempt to offer any evidence or arguments on one side or another even of the main question at issue. It may be useful, however, to give a rapid summary of the different opinions which have been held as to the Rule of Faith: useful chiefly for this reason, that even those of the opinions referred to, which, when clearly understood, are seen to be most contrary to sound doctrine, and which, in fact,

are identified with some of the worst corruptions of Christianity, are often, to a greater or less extent, and in one form or another, embraced unconsciously, and in total ignorance of their dangerous tendency, by all sorts of persons, to the great hindrance of their advance in the true faith of Christ.

I. The first opinion I shall notice, is that which has been long held by the Church of Rome, and which, as has been abundantly proved, especially by Dean Goode, in his 'Divine Rule of Faith and Practice,' is throughout adopted by a large and influential party in the Church of England. It is summed up in the following five propositions by the writer just named :—

" 1. That consentient patristical tradition, or 'catholic consent,' is an unwritten word of God, a divine informant in religion, and consequently entitled, as to its *substance*, to equal respect with the Holy Scriptures. 2. That such tradition is consequently a part of the divinely-revealed rule of faith and practice. 3. That it is a necessary part of the divine rule of faith and practice, on account of the *defectiveness* of Scripture: for that—(1) Though it does not reveal to us any fundamental articles of faith or practice not *noticed* in Scripture, Holy Scripture containing—that is, *giving hints or notices of*—all the fundamental articles of faith and practice, it is yet a necessary part of the divine rule of faith and practice, as the interpreter of Scripture, and as giving the full development of many points, some of which are fundamental, which are but imperfectly developed in Scripture; and, (2) It is an important part of that rule, as conveying to us various important divinely-revealed doctrines and rules not contained in Scripture. 4. That it is a necessary part of the divine

rule of faith and practice, because of the *obscurity* of Scripture even in some of the fundamental articles, which makes Scripture insufficient to *teach* us even the fundamentals of faith and practice. 5. That it is only by the testimony of patristical tradition that we are assured of the *inspiration* of Scripture, what books are *canonical*, and the genuineness of what we receive as such."—(Goode's Divine Rule, vol. i. p. 36.)

Without attempting an inquiry into the arguments adduced in support of this hypothesis, it must be stated in a single sentence, that all the data on which it professedly rests are disputed by its opponents. Thus the insufficiency of Scripture, whether from omission of topics or from obscurity of style, to communicate all necessary knowledge, is denied. The texts, too, which are quoted from the sacred volume as recommending and giving sanction to other sources of such knowledge, are said to be wrested from their obvious meaning for this purpose: Scripture itself expressly claiming to be, as from its nature it appears to have been intended to be, sufficient for all the purposes which tradition is supposed to aid it in accomplishing. And the existence of traditions from the Apostles, in the writings of the Fathers, which in any way supplement the teaching of Scripture—above all, of traditions sanctioned by anything which can be called Catholic Consent—is declared to be a gratuitous assumption, without the slightest historical evidence. It is also further asserted, in opposition to this view, that the same practice of making tradition a supplement to Scripture in the discovery of the will of God, which is thus common to the Roman Catholics and Tractarians, was, in the case of the Scribes and Pharisees of His own day, expressly con-

demned by our Lord himself as unauthorised, and as a means of perverting the truth and making the Word of God of none effect ; nay, that the admission of patristic traditions (so-called) to an equal authority with Scripture in matters of faith, is not only liable to the same condemnation as the error of the later Jewish Church, but has, in fact, been followed by like results.

How far the allegations made on the one side or the other of this great controversy between Romanism and Protestantism are well founded, is of course a question on which abundant materials for forming an opinion are accessible.

II. The theory set forth by various writers, but especially by Dr Newman, in his 'Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,' and which makes "the history of eighteen centuries" "our most natural informant concerning the doctrine and worship of Christianity," though professedly brought forward in defence of the Catholic doctrine, may be considered as a distinct opinion with regard to that which constitutes the rule of faith. Its general tenor has been already mentioned. (See before, p. 99, note.)

That much valuable truth enters into Dr Newman's theory, and truth which is more especially important as illustrating in some of its aspects what I believe to be the true doctrine of the increase of faith, is admitted. The following examples may be quoted :—

" If Christianity be an universal religion, suited not to one locality or period, but to all times and places, it cannot but vary in its relations and dealings towards the world around it. . . . Principles require a very various application, according to persons and circumstances, and must be thrown into new shapes, accord-

ing to the form of society which they are to influence. . . . The refutation and remedy of errors cannot precede their rise ; and thus the fact of false developments involves the correspondent *manifestation* of true ones."—(P. 96, 97.) "The whole Bible . . . is written on the principle of development. As the revelation proceeds, it is ever new, yet ever old. St John, who completes it, declares that he writes no 'new commandment unto his brethren,' but an old commandment, which they had from the beginning.' And then he adds, 'A new commandment I write unto you.' The same test of development is suggested in our Lord's words on the Mount, . . . 'Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets ; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' He does not reverse, but perfect, what has gone before."—(P. 103.) "It is in point to notice also the structure and style of Scripture, a structure so unsystematic and yarious, and a style so figurative and indirect, that no one would presume at first sight to say what it is, and what it is not. It cannot, as it were, be mapped, or its contents catalogued ; but after all our diligence, to the end of our lives and to the end of the Church it must be an unexplored and unsubdued land, with heights and valleys, forests and streams, on the right and left of our path, and close about us, full of concealed wonders and choice treasures. Of no doctrine whatever, which does not actually contradict what has been delivered, can it be peremptorily asserted that it is not in Scripture ; of no reader, whatever be his study of it, can it be said that he has mastered every doctrine which it contains. 'The more distinct and particular knowledge,' Butler says, 'of those things, the study of which the Apostle

calls "going on unto perfection," . . . and of the prophetic parts of revelation, like many parts of natural and even civil knowledge, may require very exact thought and careful consideration. The hindrances, too, of natural and of supernatural light and knowledge have been of the same kind. And as it is owned the whole scheme of Scripture is not yet understood, so if it ever comes to be understood before the "restitution of all things," and without miraculous interpositions, it must be in the same way as natural knowledge is come at, by the continuance and progress of learning and of liberty, and by particular persons attending to, comparing, and pursuing intimations scattered up and down it, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world. For this is the way in which all improvements are made, by thoughtful men tracing on obscure hints, as it were, dropped on us by nature accidentally, or which seem to come into our minds by chance. Nor is it at all incredible that a book which has been so long in the possession of mankind should contain many truths as yet undiscovered. For all the same phenomena and the same faculties of investigation, from which such great discoveries in natural knowledge have been made in the present and last age, were equally in the possession of mankind several thousand years before. And possibly it might be intended that events, as they come to pass, should open and ascertain the meaning of several parts of Scripture.'—(Anal. ii. 3.) Butler, of course, was not contemplating the case of new articles of faith, or developments imperative on our acceptance." —(P. 110, 111.) "While Scripture nowhere recognises itself or asserts the inspiration of those passages which are most essential, it distinctly anticipates the develop-

ment of Christianity, both as a polity and as a doctrine. In one of our Lord's parables, 'the kingdom of heaven' is even compared to 'a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and hid in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree.' And again, 'So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how; for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself.' Here an internal element of life, whether principle or doctrine, is spoken of rather than any mere external manifestation; and it is observable that the spontaneous as well as the gradual character of the growth is intimated."—(P. 112.)

Now, as far as these sentences and others indicate, first, that there is to be found *within the period embraced by the canon of Scripture* a real development of doctrine, in the sense which these words more properly bear—that is, in the sense of an actual advance from a less complete to a more complete *revelation* of the will of God; and, secondly, that even after the close of the canon of Scripture there has been on the part of the Church generally, or of individual Christians, a progress in their *understanding of Scripture*;—they teach nothing to which reasonable objection can be taken, and much which it is essential that we should bear constantly in mind.

The theory of Dr Newman, however, as we have seen, goes much farther than this, and lays down the principle, that the progressive revelation of the will of God to our salvation, which was carried on throughout the times of the old dispensation down to the end of

our Lord's ministry and that of the Apostles, has been continued since the close of the New Testament canon, and still continues; in fact, that, e.g., the Romanism of the Middle Ages, or of the present day, may be held to be not less truly a legitimate development of the doctrine of Christ than that was of the teaching of the Prophets and of the Law of Moses.

It is true that, according to Dr Newman, all the developments of Christian doctrine since the days of the Apostles, thus claimed as constituting a part of the Rule of Faith, "rest upon definite, even though sometimes obscure, sentences of Scripture." To show to how much this admission amounts, and the true effect of his theory, let me only quote some of the illustrations of such developments which are adduced by Dr Newman himself: "Purgatory may appeal to the 'saving by fire,' and 'entering through much tribulation into the kingdom of God; ' the communication of the merits of the saints, to our 'receiving a prophet's reward' for 'receiving a prophet in the name of a prophet,' and 'a righteous man's reward' for 'receiving a righteous man in the name of a righteous man; ' the real presence to 'This is My body; voluntary poverty to 'Sell all that thou hast; ' obedience to 'He was in subjection to His parents; ' the honour paid to creatures, animate or inanimate, to *Laudate Dominum in sanctis Ejus*, and *Adorate scabellum pedum Ejus.*"—(P. 112.)

III. Another opinion is that which is characteristic of Mysticism in all its endless varieties, and which, though sometimes admitting the authority of Scripture—but in a subordinate degree, and as at best occupying a second place—makes an Inward Light, whether intuitive or the

immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate rule of faith.

The tendencies of the human mind to which this opinion owes its birth have found expression in almost every age of Christianity; but we need go no farther back for its history as a religious dogma than to the earlier days of the Reformation in Germany. Amongst other extravagances in doctrine, which were unhappily accompanied by even more deplorable results of a distempered imagination, the supremacy of the inward light was one of the peculiar tenets of Munzer and the Anabaptists, who "charged the Reformers with introducing a new Bibliolatry, lightly esteemed the Bible, and exalted the inward light above it."—(Neander, *Hist. Christ. Dogmas*, vol. ii. p. 631.) Although in the case of some of them complicated with rationalistic and other directly antichristian views, the same principle was adopted by many others of the sectaries of the same period. One of its modifications was introduced by Theobald Thamer, for a long time a professor at Marburg. "Instead of the authority of the Divine Word, as the supreme source of religious belief, he laid down," according to Neander, "three sources: the Creature, the Spiritual Conscience, and the true Holy Writ. The defect of the Lutherans was that they had only one source. The Conscience is the *Deus Revelatus*; it is Christ in our hearts. The letter without us cannot testify of the truth within us apart from the Conscience. The inward word of Conscience lies already in the heart: the oral word and the letter only confirm it, that we may be without excuse at the Last Day."—(History of Christian Dogmas, vol. ii. p. 631, 632.) This view attained, however, its most sys-

tematic form, and that form in which it is perhaps still best known among ourselves, in the teaching of the English sect of the Quakers. It is thus laid down in the shape of distinct propositions by one of the ablest of their authorities, Robert Barclay of Ury: "Seeing no man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son revealeth Him; and seeing that the revelation of the Son is in and by the Spirit, therefore the testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be only revealed, who . . . by the revelation of the Spirit hath manifested Himself all along unto the sons of men, both patriarchs, prophets, and apostles; which revelations of God by the Spirit, whether by outward voices and appearances, dreams, or inward objective manifestations in the heart, were of old the formal object of their faith, *and remaineth yet so to be.* . . . These divine inward revelations, which we make absolutely necessary for the building up of true faith, neither do nor can ever contradict the outward teaching of the Scriptures, or right and sound reason. *Yet from hence it will not follow that these divine revelations are to be subjected to the examination either of the outward testimony of the Scriptures, or of the natural reason of man, as to a more noble or certain rule or touchstone.* For this divine revelation and inward illumination is that which is evident and clear of itself, forcing, by its own evidence and clearness, the well-disposed understanding to assent. . . . The Scriptures of truth . . . are only a declaration of the fountain, and not the fountain itself: therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate primary rule of faith and manners. . . . Nevertheless

they are and may be esteemed *a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and certainty.*"—(Barclay's *Apology for the Quakers*, p. 4, 5.) Views substantially identical with those of the German Mystics of the times of the Reformation, and of the English Quakers, as represented by Fox and Barclay, have continued to find favour with large classes of professed Christian believers. They are constantly to be met with, for instance, in the writings of the Moravian Brethren and the early Methodists; and it is notorious that they are extensively prevalent in our own day—prevalent among the members of all communions; being, in fact, entertained unsuspectingly (as I have said is the case with all such errors) by many persons who are as little aware of their history as of their dangerous tendency. They are views, however, which, under whatever name they may pass, and whatever reverence they may profess to pay to the Holy Spirit as the source of all divine knowledge, virtually—nay, sometimes avowedly—substitute the human reason, or rather the imaginations and illusions of the human mind, for His unerring inspirations.

I have spoken of the opinion as to the Inward Light being the Rule of Faith, as rampant in the early days of the Reformation. It is fair to remember that it was disowned and exposed from the first by the leading Reformers themselves. The following was the opinion of Calvin on the subject, as to be found in a Chapter in his *Institutes* entitled "Omnia pietatis principia revertuntur fanaticos, qui posthabita Scriptura, ad revelationem transvolant." "As for those," he says, "who, repudiating the Scriptures, imagine that they have some other way, I know not what, of penetrating to God, they are

to be esteemed not so much under the influence of error as madness. For certain enthusiasts have lately appeared, who, under the pretext of giving the first place to the Spirit, themselves refuse to read, and deride the simplicity of all who follow what they call the dead letter, and the letter that killeth. But I wish to know from themselves what is that Spirit by whose afflatus they are raised to so sublime a height that they dare to despise the doctrine of Christ as mean and puerile. For if they reply that it is the Spirit of Christ, their confidence is extremely absurd, since they must concede that the Apostles and other believers in the primitive Church were not illuminated by any other Spirit. Yet none of these men thence learned contempt for the Word of God, but were only imbued with the more reverence for it. . . . Then, I should wish them to tell me whether they have received any other Spirit than Him whom Christ promised to His disciples. However extreme may be their madness, they will scarcely be so insane as to venture to make such a claim. Yet what Spirit was promised but one who should not speak of Himself, but should suggest and instil into the minds of the faithful the same truths which He had before delivered through the Word? Therefore the office of the Spirit promised to us is not to make new and before unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new kind of doctrine, by which we might be led away from the received doctrine of the Gospel, but to seal on our mind that very doctrine which by the Gospel is already set forth. . . . These miserable men err as if bent on their own destruction, while they seek the Spirit from themselves rather than from God. But (they say) it is an indignity to the Spirit, to whom all things are subject,

that He should be subjected to the Scriptures ; as if it were unworthy of the Holy Spirit to maintain an equality and conformity with Himself in all things, and never to vary from His own revelations. . . . I admit that He is brought to a test, but it is that test by which it has pleased Him that His authority should be confirmed to us. . . . The Lord has so joined together the certainty of His Word and Spirit, that our minds are duly imbued with reverence for the Word when the Spirit enables us there to behold the face of God ; and, on the other hand, we embrace the Spirit without danger of delusion when we recognise Him in His image —that is, in His Word. . . . When Paul says to the Thessalonians, ‘Quench not the Spirit,’ he does not carry them aloft to inane speculations apart from the Word, but he immediately adds, ‘Despise not prophesying.’ How is this answered by these swelling enthusiasts (*tumidi ἐνθουσιασταί*) who think the only true illumination consists in laying aside and bidding farewell to the Word of God, while, with no less confidence than folly, they seize hold of whatever fantastic notion they may themselves have conceived ? A far different sobriety surely becomes the children of God, who, as they feel that without the Spirit of God they are destitute of the light of truth, so are not ignorant that the Word of God is the instrument by which God dispenses the illumination of the Spirit to the faithful.”—(*Instit. l. i. c. ix.*)

IV. Then there is the Rule of the Socinians, “ who, admitting that a revelation has been made, employ reason as the supreme judge of its doctrines, and boldly strike out of their creed every article that is not conformable to those notions which may be derived from the exercise of reason.”—(*Hill’s Lectures on Divinity,*

vol. ii. p. 305.) See also Mansel's *Limits of Religious Thought*, Lectures vi. and vii.

V. The last opinion on the subject to which I shall refer is that which in this work has been assumed to be in harmony with the doctrine of the Gospel throughout, and therefore entitled to the acceptance of all true Christians—namely, that the Word of God, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is a sufficient and the only rule of faith.

It must be remembered that those who hold this opinion do not refuse to acknowledge that there exist elements of truth in the special grounds on which the theories already noticed are founded, however unwarrantable these theories must be upon the whole esteemed.

Thus it is freely conceded to the Romanists and Tractarians that on many topics not unconnected with religion, on which men might desire information, the Scriptures are confessedly silent, or refrain at least from saying as much as would satisfy our curiosity; although, in making this concession, it is at the same time maintained that there may be reasons for such reserve, of which we cannot judge, and that, at all events, according to its own claims, Scripture reveals enough of the truth for all practical purposes of edification and comfort. It is also conceded to them, that, as having been originally written in languages not now understood except by men of learning; as containing frequent allusions to historical facts, and to local and temporary circumstances of various kinds, equally unintelligible (without explanation) to the greater proportion of mankind; and, indeed, on many accounts which I need not here particularise,—the Scriptures cannot be made fully available for the spiritual edification of all believers without assistance

from other sources : so that every advantage ought to be taken of the labours even of uninspired men, who in any age of Christianity—not excepting, certainly, those times which were the nearest to Christ and the Apostles—are for every reason most competent to interpret and explain the true meaning of the inspired text; a purpose which God Himself has indeed contemplated in the institution of the ministry of the Word. It is once more conceded to them that the *traditions* of the early Church—understanding that word in its non-ecclesiastical sense—afford valuable, though not infallible, testimony in aid of the evidences by which we are enabled to believe in the genuineness and authenticity of the books of Scripture.

It is conceded to writers like Dr Newman that the progress of the Church of Christ, with the advance of knowledge generally in the world, have tended, not certainly to expand or supplement the doctrines contained in Scripture, but at least to develop them, in the sense of bringing to light more perfectly than was at first possible their true though latent meaning ; so that the truth revealed to man, while in all respects the same to-day as it was eighteen hundred years ago, is in some respects better understood now than it was then.

It is conceded, again, to those who profess to be guided by what is called an Inward Light, that although they err in imagining that believers have any reason to expect revelations of the will of God, independently of the written Word, nothing can be more certain than that “the things of the Spirit of God” must be “spiritually discerned,” and that therefore the illumination of the same Spirit by whom the Scriptures were inspired is both needed and promised in the case of every one of us : needed and promised, however, not to supersede or

supplement the Scriptures, but only to open our understandings that we may understand them (1 Cor. ii. 14; Luke xxiv. 45; Eph. i. 18).

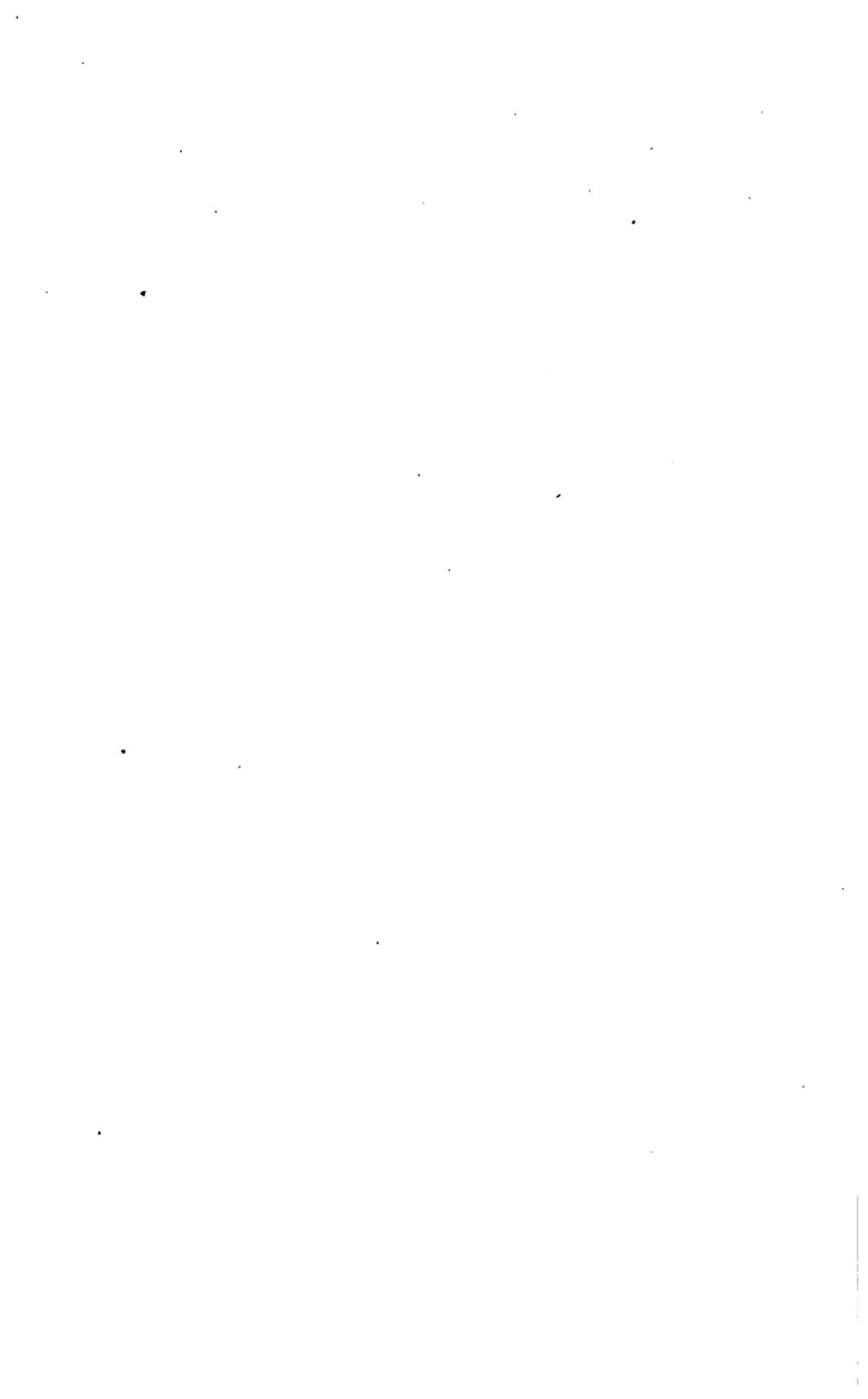
And, once more, it is conceded to the Socinians, that the human reason, though not competent to sit in judgment on the value of the doctrines of Christ, or to receive and reject them on the strength of its own independent conclusions,* is yet not without more than one important province in matters of faith, and especially that it must judge (within its own powers) of the evidence for the authority of Scripture as the Word of God, only yielding submission (as in that case it ought to yield implicit submission) to that guide, on reasonable proof that such authority does in fact belong to it.

Whatever concessions, however, are thus made to their opponents, or rather, on whatever points they may admit that their opponents do not materially differ in opinion from themselves, those whose view is here adopted maintain that Scripture is the only Rule of

* "High as man is placed above the creatures around him," to quote the words of one of the greatest of modern philosophers, "there is a higher and far more exalted position within his view; and the ways are infinite in which he occupies his thoughts about the fears or hopes or expectations of a future life. I believe that the truth of that future cannot be brought to his knowledge by any exertion of his mental powers, however exalted they may be: that it is made known to him by other teaching than his own, and is received through simple belief of the testimony given. . . . It would be improper here to enter upon this subject further than to claim an absolute distinction between religious and ordinary belief. I shall be reproached with the weakness of refusing to apply those mental operations which I think good in respect of high things to the very highest. I am content to bear the reproach."—Professor Farady's Lecture on the Education of the Judgment: Modern Culture—Its True Aims and Requirements, p. 194.

Faith, and that in so far as any opinion on the subject detracts from the authority of Scripture as the sufficient and exclusive source of all our knowledge of Divine truth, or destroys in any way our confidence in Scripture, or substitutes for Scripture any other revelation of the will of God to our salvation, it is false, and not without peril to the souls of as many as accept it. Their language is, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. viii. 20).

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